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editorial



EVERY READER of science fiction is, though he may not be consciously aware of it, a member of a specialised group. Specialised in that he, along with others who are similarly interested, has something in common. There is nothing special about that. Every human being can be classified into one or more classes and, human nature being what it is, each will tend to think that his own class is a little more important than the others.

I am not going to argue the relative merits of chosen classes; there isn't any. The keen stamp collector will wonder what on earth a grown man can see in making and flying model aeroplanes; the model aeroplane enthusiast will have no regard for the cheese-label collector; the man who takes a delight in assembling a multitude of coloured scraps of paper will raise an eyebrow at the concept of those who are willing to risk their necks climbing mountains. Hobbies appeal to those who are interested in them, and the appeal can be just as intense no matter what the hobby is. And, of course, many people have more than one hobby or interest: they are, in effect,

members of more than one class.

The interesting thing about these classes is the activity within the groups themselves. Most of them have both professional and amateur magazines to cater for their tastes, have get-togethers and conventions, and all have the affinity which can only be found in groups which exist because of a commonly shared interest.

Science fiction is no exception to the rule.

Science fiction "fandom," the loose appellation applying to all those who read, write or otherwise take an interest in imaginative literature, is, however, somewhat peculiar to itself. For example, any and everyone can be a member. Any and everyone can subscribe to the amateur magazines, "fanzines," if they wish. They can do more, they can become quite active members and known personalities simply by writing letters, articles, and, if they wish, by publishing their own "fanzines." "Fandom" is a wide-open club in which anyone can become active. You don't have to join "fandom." The mere fact that you are reading this makes you an automatic member. If you want to contact

others who also share your interest, then you can do so with a minimum of trouble.

The best time, of course, is at conventions.

The first British Science Fiction Convention was held at Leeds in 1937; the second in London in 1938. Aside from a small gathering in 1941, there were no organised conventions until 1949. This proved so successful that another was held the following year and a really big effort was made during the Festival of Britain in 1951 when more than 200 enthusiasts got together in the Royal Hotel, London, for the biggest British Science Fiction Convention up to that date. Since then, there has been a National Convention held in this country each year: London in 1952 and 1953; Manchester in 1954; Kettering in 1955 and 1956, each convention proving more enjoyable than its predecessor.

Science fiction, being of world-wide interest, has world-wide conventions, the biggest taking place in the United States. The First World Science Fiction Convention was held in New York in 1938. In 1948 the venue shifted from the United States to Toronto, Canada, the only time the World Convention has been held outside the boundaries of the U.S.A. In 1953 Mr. Campbell, the previous editor of *Authentic*, attended the giant Philcon at Philadelphia, which had an attendance of over

a thousand convention-goers. In 1956 the Fourteenth World Science Fiction Convention was held again in New York.

The Fifteenth World Science Fiction Convention will be held in London during the 6th-7th-8th September, 1957.

This is a splendid opportunity for anyone who has ever read and enjoyed science fiction to meet the men who help to provide that enjoyment. It is traditional that convention-time is the time when readers can voice their comments face-to-face with authors and editors, and you can meet the men who, as yet, may be only names beneath the story titles. A large contingent of Americans will be attending, together with representatives from all European countries. Now, if you are interested, is the great opportunity to get in closer contact with the group of which you are, even if inactive, a member.

And don't feel that, because you aren't known or don't know anyone, you won't be made welcome. One thing I can say about conventions: they are the most friendly get-togethers I know.

But don't write to me about it. All details from: R. Wild, 204 Wellmeadow Road, London, S.E.6. And remember that this will be the most ambitious convention ever held in this country.

I hope to see you there.

E.C.T.

TROJAN HORSE

by ROBERT PRESSLIE

It was a man-hunt with a difference—they weren't sure that they were hunting a man. But whoever or whatever had arrived in the space ship had to be found. And found fast!

Illustrated by P. R. Green



THERE was nothing clandestine about the visit. The ship was tracked all the way in from the Moon.

The night sky became busy as the observatories collaborated by radio. Between them they sorted out the first sightings and the last. On a graph-paper Moon, two spots were marked and a line drawn between them. On the assumption that the reported object was travelling in a con-

centric orbit, its speed was calculated. On the same assumption, its new position was predicted. Bowl antennæ swung to trawl the sky, seeking the unknown flying fish.

The first blips came an hour later. The unknown object was found to be spiralling inwards to Earth. From that moment the radar net never once lost its catch.

Even the landing-point was predicted to within a mile; with



all the Earth to cover, that was practically pin-point marking. But it was not quite good enough.

When they found the ship in the misty dawn it was empty.

It was invitingly open. The invitation to inspect also extended inside; nothing was locked. And there was a pile of books beside which someone had laid a sheaf of notes, complete with sufficient symbols to act as a guide in translation.

With the aid of the symbols the books were translated. They were text books, with a wealth of science in them that made nuclear physics strictly kindergarten stuff.

The notes were of simpler content. They contained a message of congratulation to the translators and another invitation. Boiled down to one sentence, the invitation read: *The ship is yours. Take it and learn.*

The full translation took two weeks. It took the politicians of the world two months to decide what to do about the vessel.

It took them that long to admit that none of them wanted it, and to agree that since they were stuck with it, the ship must be the concern of the whole world.

In spite of the invitation, not a finger had been laid on the ship. The invitation stank. More than once the ship was labelled a Greek gift. And the public followed the lead of the Press in referring to it as a Trojan Horse.

The world committee finally came to a decision. The ship would not be touched until its crew had been found, until somebody answered the big question: WHY? Why had Earth been presented with such a gift? Where was the catch? There had to be one. According to the helpful notes, the crew had consisted of one. One what? That was anybody's guess, but, until that alien had been found and questions had been asked, the gift was going to be left on the doorstep.

A man was chosen to find the alien.

Joey Simons was little and fat, and perspired a lot. He had bad feet. But he had the persistence of a mongoose with a snake in its teeth. Which was just as well, for the trail was then dead cold—ten weeks cold.

In the bar round the corner from the drug store, Dave Knox was having a beer before he went home. He was rising from his stool to go when he felt a light tap on his shoulder.

"Stay a little longer," said the girl, her hand firmly persuasive. "I'll buy you a drink," she added.

He could have refused, told her to mind her own business or mounted his high horse and said he always bought his own. He swivelled to face the bar and said: "Make it a Pilsner."

The girl perched herself on the

next stool and stared at him intently. Without turning, he could feel her eyes on him.

Using his beer like a crystal ball, he said: "You were in the store yesterday. I remember you."

"And the day before."

"Didn't see you then. Saw you yesterday, though. I filled a prescription for you." His voice dropped lower in recollection. "Jackson. Miss A. Jackson."

"A for Amethyst," said the girl.

That brought his head up and his face round to hers. He saw a girl with near-black hair and a golden skin. It wasn't tan, either. It was twenty-four-carat quality.

"You a high yaller?" he asked. There was neither insult nor sneer in his voice.

"No."

"Just asking, no offence meant. With your colouring, the Jackson and the Amethyst . . . I just wondered."

"That's all right. Do you mind if I ask you something?"

He took a mouthful of lager. "Shoot."

"What did you give that old man?"

"What old man?"

"The one who sat here a minute ago. I was watching. He came in, obviously looking for you. He spoke to you, then you said something to him and handed him a few tablets."

Dave Knox emptied his glass

before answering. "He's unemployed. He gets headaches and can't afford to buy anything for them."

The girl shook her head. "It didn't take fifteen minutes just to give him a few tablets for free."

"I didn't want him bothering me again."

"So?"

"So I had to give him a spiel. I told him I knew what caused his headaches. I also said I knew exactly how to cure them for ever."

"Did he ask what the cause was?"

"Of course. But I didn't tell him. I said it could only be expressed in medical terms which he wouldn't understand. I got him off the scent by stressing the potency of the cure."

The girl nodded. "Then you gave him the tablets?"

"No. I refused. If they had been too easy to get, they wouldn't have done much good. I hedged, told him they were too potent for general distribution."

"You must have done it well. I remember you looking stern. But you relented?"

Dave agreed. "Slowly. And I confided that I used to have the same headaches."

"Did you?"

"Not me! But the sympathetic touch works wonders. I said I had taken the cure myself—I

probably added that I got the tablets from the manufacturer as a special favour. Then I said I had a few left and would let him have them if he didn't tell anybody. He left quite happy."

There was softness in the girl's eyes as she said: "Didn't I overhear something about a job?"

Dave Knox put down his glass with unnecessary firmness. He spoke gruffly and defensively as if to cover an opening through which his soul was showing.

"Mulloys asked me to look out for a part-time porter. Old Regan filled the bill."

The softness was still in the girl's eyes. "All that," she said in wonder. "All that to cure an old man's headaches. And I suppose the tablets were something quite ordinary?"

"Aspirin."

"You think they'll work?"

"I'd bet my life on it."

"You sound very sure."

"All he had was worry. He had no job, he felt old and unwanted. He worried about not having enough money. The job will cure all that. Without nagging worries, the headaches will go. The aspirins were show business."

He sat looking into his glass for a while. The broodiness which had been kindled by the girl's insight was closing in on him.

"Are you a snooper?" he asked. The suspicion in his voice was more forced than real. "Maybe it

was unethical, but it wasn't illegal."

"I'm not accusing you."

He refused to listen. He took a masochistic delight in his frequent black moods. "What right have you to come in here and quiz me?"

The girl bit her lip. "I'm only interested in the way you cure people."

Dave saw the hurt in her eyes. Having found the way to hurt her, he took advantage of it. "Scram," he said.

Afterwards, as so often happened when he had offended human feelings, he despised himself. Right then there was only the vicious compulsion to be cruel.

"Scram," he repeated.

The girl got off her stool and took a few steps back but did not retreat further.

With his sense of showmanship, Dave saw the supreme way of hurting her again. He reached for the crossbar under his stool and unhooked the two walking sticks.

He edged himself off the stool and stood before her, supporting himself on the sticks, savouring the shock in her eyes.

"Well!" he said satisfied. "Didn't you know? The great healer can't heal himself!"

Joey Simons had been on many a hunt. That was his job—to find people. Some cases had been easy,

some difficult. This new assignment was appalling. There was nowhere to start. And his job was not to trace a missing person, but to find someone extra, to hunt down one solitary being who did not belong in all the Earth's millions.

There was not a single clue to the appearance of the missing alien. Joey did not know whether he was looking for a man, woman, beast or thing. Being of an open mind, he did not rule out altogether the further possibilities that the alien was invisible or polymorphous, or mechanical, or android. But he decided to look for a human. Whatever the alien's natural form, its best bet for successful submergence was to pose as a human.

It took Joey some hours of cogitation to come to this conclusion, but he felt more hopeful for it. He was no longer faced with the problem of finding an alien. His job now was to find a human. And humans he could find.

He set about hunting the alien exactly as he would have hunted anyone else.

For a start he tore up the rail voucher which would have taken him to the moor where the ship lay. He reasoned that the alien would already be in the metropolis.

Joey pictured the alien as a foreigner trying to make himself

inconspicuous. To do that, the alien would have to learn local speech and customs; he might also be seeking more sinister information. The metropolis was the honeypot for all these. The metropolis was also Joey's stamping-ground.

He made the conventional first move by sounding the hotels and boarding houses. It was a long, wearying task, but Joey was big enough in his field to have leg men to do most of the work.

Hotel managers have an eye and a memory for strangers. They are quick to place a man by his habits—or by his lack of common habits. Quite frequently their observance had set Joey on a successful trail.

But not this time. The quarry had three months' start and Joey didn't expect too much from his contacts. In fact, he got nothing. Yet he was satisfied. He had made the motions.

Sticking to his normal hunting routine, his next move was the one he always made. He went to see Calder Nairn. As always he was made welcome.

"I've been expecting you, Joey," said Nairn. "Sit down. How are your feet? Still troubling you?"

Nairn's position in the mammoth chrome and steel news building was obscure. Other employees said he had been installed with the furniture. Some said he really owned the paper and the

nominal owner was a figurehead. Joey had never tried to pry. He knew Nairn as a collector.

A newspaper is continually undated with information. Some of it is used. Some of it is filed for further use. Most of it is consigned to the furnace. Calder Nairn went through it before it was burned. He collected anything that took his fancy, any item that was strange and inexplicable.

Joey tapped him. "What have you got for me?"

"I hear you're after the spaceman."

"You're not supposed to know that sort of thing," Joey protested. But his protest was only conversation; there were few secrets that didn't reach Nairn's ears.

"Have you tried the hotels?" the newsman asked.

"You know I have."

"And?"

"And nothing. Come on, Cal. Give if you have anything to give." Joey knew that Nairn liked news for news, so he added: "If you ring the Cliquot Hotel, Room Two-O-Two, and ask for Mrs. Lowell, you'll be able to settle that rumour about your favourite telestar being married."

"Thank you, Joey, thank you." And although Nairn made no memo, Joey knew he wouldn't forget what he had been told. He never did.

"Now," continued Nairn. "Let me see. There's a boy in a drug-store who is beginning to think he is God. There's an old wench downtown—her dog sees ghosts. There's a nut in Ridgemoor who speaks a language nobody has been able to place yet. And then there's Vestro—the best magicians in the business haven't solved his act yet."

"That's all?"

"Joey!" The newsman was offended. "There are hundreds more. Can't you trust me to do the selecting?"

Joey apologised. He should have remembered that Nairn would have discarded anything which did not qualify for the case in hand. At the same time, he felt bound to add: "Don't forget that this could be anybody."

"I didn't, and I won't. If I hear anything else I'll let you know."

With four addresses in his pocket, Joey made his farewell.

The block of flats where the old woman lived was nearest. He made that his first call. He rang the bell, not hoping for too much. He expected less when the crone inched the door open.

Joey slid his foot into the narrow gap. "Miss Winslow," he read the nameplate. "Miss Winslow, I've come to give you something for nothing."

The old woman hadn't put a comb to her hair recently and her grey skin didn't testify to any recent acquaintance with soap and water. In the cracked-putty face one eye stared nowhere, glazed and cataracted; the other eye wept continuously over a permanently turned-down beef-red lower lid.

The weeping eye showed no rejoicing at Joey's offer.

Joey fished in his pocket, took out a flat tin which he had picked up at a self-service store on his way.

"Of course," he said. "This won't be any use to you unless you have a dog——"

The crone sucked in her lips. Joey interpreted the action correctly: it was a smile—folded over toothless gums.

"You have?" he said, and pressed home his advantage by shouldering himself inside the door. He didn't give her time to think.

"I represent the 'Growla' company. To introduce our produce, it's my job to give away ten thousand tins of 'Growla'—the food that makes dogs doggie. This tin is yours without obligation. All I ask is that you follow your dog's advice when he asks for more."

The eye wept thanks and the gums smacked out: "Jimboy already has 'Growla.' It's his favourite."

"There! What did I tell you?" Joey picked his next words with precision. "Jimboy must be a real *wise* dog!"

"He is, he is. He's psychic, you know."

"Never!"

The crone nodded eagerly. "He really is. He can sense departed spirits. There's a ghost in this house you know."

Apart from letting his mouth hang appropriately slack, Joey did no prompting. And, as he expected, he got the whole story.

The canine seance took place every night, usually around eleven, but not at any precise moment. The signal for its commencement was the opening of one of Jimboy's eyes. Jimboy slept a lot. He didn't stir very often. But around eleven each night, first one eye then the other would open lazily. He would crawl from under the table, squirm on his belly to the door and sit there with his back hair stiff as a scrubbing brush.

"Anybody in this flat come in about that time every night?" asked Joey.

The crone stared her disdain. "I thought of that. Believe me, sir, there's nobody on those stairs when Jimboy wakes. Nobody living, that is. Jimboy sees someone——" Her voice dropped to a confidential whisper. "Someone who has passed over. Beyond, you know."

"You're quite sure?" said Joey.
"Nobody there at all?"

"See for yourself, mister. It's almost eleven now."

The rest was anti-climax. Ten minutes after eleven Jimboy peeked into the spirit world. The old girl was at Joey's side as he whipped the door open.

"Well!" she said triumphantly.

And Joey didn't have the heart to tell her that her poor eyesight had failed to see the upstairs cat being put out for the night.

After that, the disappointments of the next day were more bearable. It was only to be expected that the untranslatable inmate of Ridgemoor should turn out to be just what he should be—a lunatic knowing no tongue but gibberish. And Joey simply shrugged when the drugstore owner told him that his dispenser had been with him over two years—which ruled him out as the new-come alien.

Which left Vestro, the magician. Joey needed only ten minutes quiet talk to discover how Vestro was able to astound audiences up and down the country.

"You've got a good act," said Joey, in the dressing room. "Had me completely baffled."

The illusionist answered through a tissue full of cold cream. "That's what they all say." He had the immodesty of complete assurance.

Joey proceeded to crack his conceit. "However," he began,

"I'm sure that what may be puzzling to me must be old hat to other professionals. Don't tell me that old Nick Marvel, for instance—don't tell me he doesn't know how you work that stunt where you dissolve a girl in a glass tank of water."

Vestro screwed the tissue, tossed it aside, picked up a towel. "Nick has his name on the posters. He testified he was beaten."

"That's funny," said Joey. "I remember Nick from the old days. He used to do something similar. On a smaller scale, of course. Just dropping coloured balls into tumblers and making them disappear when he filled the tumblers with water. Wasn't it something to do with certain salts in the water and polarised light?"

The towel poised halfway to Vestro's face. "What are you trying to build, mister? What paper are you from?"

"No paper. Mind if I sit down? My feet are killing me."

"Get out."

"Soon. I came looking for miracles, but I think I've found a fraud. Tell me if my guess is right. Tell me—how many other illusionists are backing you?"

Vestro's front collapsed. His fingers teased the edge of the towel nervously. "There's nothing dishonest about it," he said. "Nothing *criminal*. Biz was bad.

We decided on this method to boost it."

Joey nodded. "The others, they gave you their best tricks, built you up as a wizard. A gimmick to stimulate public interest in illusionists generally."

"That's right. It worked. They've all got full bookings out of it."

Joey rose and patted Vestro's shoulder. "I'm sorry. I wish you had been a real wizard."

He cast a wistful glance at the posters as he left the theatre. There went the last of his leads.

The night after the girl had waylaid him in the bar, Dave Knox changed his homeward route. He changed his bar, too. His tactics didn't do much good. A couple of nights after his encounter with Amethyst Jackson the doorbell rang just as he was settling himself with a book. He guessed who was at the door. He wasn't wrong.

"What now?" he asked her coldly.

She said nothing, merely blinked her brown eyes.

"How did you find my place?"

"I followed you home the other night."

Dave tilted his head sceptically. "I didn't see you——"

"I tried not to be conspicuous." She stepped aside. "I've brought someone to see you," she added.

The someone was a boy, young, and to Dave's professional eye, just a little stunted, so that he was probably a little older than he looked. There was a heaviness about the boy's clothing which Dave did not miss—as if the clothes had been chosen more for durability than elegance.

"Which orphanage did he come from?" he asked shrewdly.

"Marsala," the girl answered. "And to forestall your next question, I got him under the Mother-For-A-Day Scheme."

She lifted her head determinedly. "And you're going to have a look at him."

Her attempt at firmness had no effect on Dave Knox. He laughed it off. "Like hell I am. Beat it before I lose my temper. Go on, both of you."

The girl pushed the boy in front of her. "Never mind Uncle Dave," she said. "He won't bite."

The boy looked up at her uncertainly. Then, avoiding Dave's eyes, he limped into the room. His left leg dragged like a lifeless stick.

Dave had a curious feeling of being trapped into a situation he did not want. He stood silent and glum as Amethyst Jackson followed the boy into the room and closed the door behind her.

"I want you to fix Bernard's leg," the girl said. She stood behind the boy and put her hands

on his shoulders. "This is Bernard. He is eight. He can't walk properly."

Dave fingered an ear. "So I see."

"You will help, won't you?"

The pleading in Amethyst's voice broke the walls of the trap. Dave snapped back to normal. "Why should I? What do you take me for, a witch doctor? Why come to me? Why can't you leave me alone? I'm not a magician!"

"I think you are. I think you could help Bernard—if you wanted to."

"I don't want to!"

"Dave, please. You've got to want to help. You can do it. You've got a—a power. A power I've never met before, a strange alien power to heal. Wait, let me finish. Apart from the old man in the bar, there have been other people, haven't there? Don't deny it. I've made enquiries. You have helped a lot of people back to health. Why you have done it, I don't know. But I know, at least I suspect, that so far you have only been dabbling. I think you could develop your talent a whole lot more. And when you have done that, then I believe you will be able to help yourself."

One word was all Dave could manage. "Myself?"

"Your own legs. I believe you could——"

Dave cut her off with another word, a swear word. It must have

been a word Amethyst had never met. She didn't flinch.

"Mister." The boy interrupted in time to prevent Dave from blowing up.

"Well?"

"Mister, the lady said you could make my leg better. When are you going to do it?"

Dave opened his mouth to say, "Never!" The calm faith in the boy's face stopped him. He said: "Come through to my bedroom."

Amethyst made to follow Dave. He slammed the door in her face. He was a long time in coming out of the room again.

He looked utterly tired. His hair was ruffled, his face drawn, his upper lip sweaty. He flopped into a chair. The girl went across to him expectantly.

"How——? Did you——?"

Dave rubbed his face. "No joy. Yet I nearly had it, nearly fixed him." He kept his hands over his face. "If only I hadn't been a cripple myself. That's what did it. How could he believe what I was telling him when I limped as much as he did?"

He sat like that a long time. He heard his name and looked up to see the girl with a tray.

"I made coffee," she said. "Bernard is asleep."

He took a cup. "I know. I left him that way. I tired him out."

"You could try again."

"No use. I gave him my whole spiel. No amount of talking will help him now. Not coming from me, anyhow. You'll have to find another miracle man."

She took his empty cup. "Tell me about your talking, Dave. You talked to the old man who had headaches. You talk comfort to customers in the store. You talked to Bernie. What is the link between talking and your ability to heal?"

"It isn't just talking. It's using the strength of your own will to force somebody else's to do what you want. The words are only tools."

"And what is it you want?"

"To make them use their own will for self-healing instead of self-destruction."

Dave leaned forward in his chair. He did not seem nearly so tired. He went on: "Very few invalids are really ill. In fact, I would go so far as to say that, apart from injury due to outside causes—street accidents and the like—there need never be any illness."

"Are you preaching immortality?"

"Today—no. But I believe it is possible to attain, if only people would stop killing themselves. If you remember what I told you about the old man who had headaches because of worry, you will understand what I mean."

Amethyst smiled apologetically.

"A glimmering, Dave. Only a glimmering. The old man I can understand. And I can understand that no one can prevent broken bones in a car smash. But what about all the cases in between? What about tuberculosis, pneumonia and all the diseases caused by germs? What about cancer, too? If you are claiming that these are preventable through a proper mental attitude, then I'm afraid I don't understand."

"That is exactly what I do claim. And if I had the time I would prove it."

"Take time, Dave."

He laughed. "I didn't mean a few minutes. It would take months to prove my point."

"Take months, then."

"What do I live on during that time? I don't work entirely for the fun of it."

"I have convertible property. Enough for both of us."

The proposal shook Dave. He was, or thought he was, too calloused to be righteously indignant. He had at one time considered what his reaction would be to some similar proposal; he had decided that if any woman wanted to keep him that would be all right with him. Now, face to face with such a proposal, he wasn't so sure.

He stalled. "What's in it for you?"

Amethyst answered promptly. "Bernard."

"Bernard? I see. You still want me to have another go at curing his lameness?"

The girl agreed.

"Why be so limited?" asked Dave. "Why not ask me to cure every sick and lame person in the world?"

"I may do that yet. Meantime I'll settle for seeing Bernard run like any other child."

In some insidious way that Dave could not analyse on reflection, this girl, Amethyst Jackson, had intruded herself firmly into his life—whether he liked it or not. His normal rudeness and dourness had been softened. The girl was all the while increasing in self-confidence. She had no fear of him. Their acquaintance was brief, but she was now an equal partner in it. Dave had lost the initiative.

With all the gruffness he could summon, he repeated what seemed to be his best line. "What's in it for you? What's your angle?"

Amethyst smiled. She pulled a chair near his. She took his hands in hers and he let her.

"I'll tell you," she said. "I've been looking for you for a long time, so I'll tell you."

The trail got colder and the evidence more tenuous. When it became negligible and, finally, non-existent, Joey Simons was ready to quit and admit that he

had failed to find the alien. But before he made the degrading admission public, he made one last round of his contacts. He left Calder Nairn till last.

"I was just going to phone you," the newsman said.

Joey pressed his own phone tighter to his ear. "You've got something?"

"I've got something. I'm not sure if it's good or not."

"Let's hear it, anyhow."

"That young man has quit the drugstore. A week ago."

Joey lifted his thin eyebrows. "Anything else?"

"Two names. James Moore Hickson and Dorothy Kerin."

"Never heard of them. About that dispenser—what do you make of it, Cal?"

"It could be a clue. He works there over two years, you begin asking questions and he disappears."

Joey let his imagination run free. "It's suspicious. Maybe he didn't work there that long. Maybe he only made the proprietor *think* that. Hypnosis, or something like that. Maybe he has only been at the store for— How long is it since the alien ship landed?"

"Could be," said Calder Nairn. "There is a connection of sorts between pharmacy and the two names I gave you."

"What connection?"

"Healing. In this case, faith

healing. James Moore Hickson was a famous natural healer. Dorothy Kerin wrote about faith healing. And, as I told you before, Knox was trying his hand at some pretty unorthodox methods of healing."

"Where did you get the tip about this James Moore Hickson and Dorothy Whosit?"

"Central Library, Joey. Lock, I've got work to do. I do work, sometimes, remember? Go along to the library and see a Louise Haig. She's an old battleaxe, but don't let her scare you. Good luck."

The Haig female looked as forbidding as the books in the Oversize Section and as tough as the morocco bindings. She must have had a soft spot for Calder Nairn because she was quite timid when Joey said who had sent him.

She fished out a two-by-four slip of paper. At the top corner were the initials D.K. Beneath these were the two names Nairn had quoted.

"This paper fell out of a book when I took it down yesterday," said the librarian. "It isn't a book that goes out very often."

"What book was that?"

"Hubert Ake's *Seven Pilgrimages*. A not too recent survey of famous places of pilgrimage. Lourdes, for instance, and——"

"What made you get in touch with Cal Nairn?"

Louise Haig touched her glasses, shoved them up her nose. "Lourdes and Dorothy Kerin. I wondered if whoever wrote that note had also taken out Dorothy Kerin's book."

"Did they?"

"No way of being sure. But that book, *The Living Touch*, had a date-of-issue stamp one day later than one of the dates on the tag in *Seven Pilgrimages*. Incidentally, *The Living Touch* is a real old one, about 1914 if I remember correctly. It hardly ever goes out these days. That made me think."

"Made you think what?"

"I looked up the tags of every book on every associated subject, no matter how remote the association. In the course of three weeks, every one of those books had been issued to some person or persons. You don't have to be a statistician to figure that the books were borrowed by one person singular."

"You don't know how singular! Any recollections?"

"Of the borrower? None. I'm surprised at myself for not seeing the connection at the time, but, of course, we issue quite a number of books every day of the year. If I had only thought, I would have been curious and noticed who was so interested in these things. But I didn't."

Joey held up a hand. "Don't apologise, Miss Haig. You've been very helpful. One thing—

did you make a list of those books? I would like a copy if you did."

"I can do better. I have them in my office. The books and the office are at your disposal."

The idea of sitting at a desk with his shoes off and his feet comfortable appealed immensely to Joey. This, and the fact that he had a lead at last, raised his spirits higher than they had been since he started hunting the alien.

"You know," he said. "You're not at all as I expected. Calder said you were . . . well, I didn't expect much co-operation."

Louise Haig smiled tightly. "Mister Nairn is too old to be a rake, but he has all the instincts. He thinks any woman who doesn't giggle and wriggle is a school-marm."

Joey followed her to the office. Before he left her, he asked: "About what time were these books borrowed?"

The librarian gave dates. She added: "About a month after the spaceship landed. Perhaps about the time when the alien pilot would have learned enough of our language to be able to read."

Joey told her: "You don't miss much," and wondered how secret his mission was supposed to be.

He was closeted in the office for two full days. The first day

was spent in rapid reading and the making of copious notes, sometimes whole paragraphs, sometimes only a chapter heading or a single word. On the second day he arranged the material.

Nobody had ever asked Joey what his methods of detection were. It is doubtful if he had ever analysed his methods. But if the question had been asked, he would probably have replied that he employed sympathetic detection. He was little and fat, and nondescript in appearance. He was so ordinary that he was invisible in a crowd, with nothing to distinguish him. Yet, when the occasion arose, he could dress his ordinariness with a coat and a hat and a chosen air. And immediately he was *somebody*—he was whoever he chose to be. His personality had the same chameleon property; he could look at the bare, meagre facts of a case in hand, relax his own personality and gradually come to see the facts as they had appeared originally to the criminal he was chasing.

On the face of it, a dozen random facts can be permuted in a great number of ways to create a great number of situations. But Joey contended that these facts had only one correct arrangement. The facts had emerged from one situation and one only. Therefore, if the correct arrangement was found, the original situation could be re-created.

Joey started the second day in the librarian's office with sheets of paper scattered all over the table in front of him. His task was to find the one correct way in which the facts cohered. He shut his mind to the point that he was looking for an alien; it made no difference; alien or terrestrial, there was still only one correct arrangement.

And at the end of the day he thought he had it.

The pattern he had woven began in the jungles of Africa. There were hundreds of instances, most of them authenticated, of men being willed to die. A native displeased the local witch-doctor; the medicine man put the evil eye on the native—and he died. Nothing anybody could do would prevent it. His death was as sure as tomorrow.

From anonymous Africans the pattern spread to well-known tycoons. Not death this time, but something more prosaic. Ulcers. The link was weak, yet Joey saw one. One man is worried into death, another worries himself into ulcers.

The link to the next part of the pattern was even weaker. As Joey saw it, if a man can be told to die, he can also be told to live. His evidence was extensive, extending from the New Testament miracles through the mediæval King's Touch to the present day use of Holy Water and unction,

and the modern miracles of Lourdes.

In this part of the pattern, healing was done without medication or physical manipulation. A word was all that was needed, or a touch—the laying on of hands. James Moore Hickson had been a practitioner of this strange medicine.

These items composed the bare fabric of Joey's pattern. The embroidery was all his own work. He culled the threads from books of his own selection.

With the aid of a pile of textbooks, he filled in the fabric. He learned that worry and fear stimulate the adrenals to produce more adrenalin. Excess adrenalin can cause peptic ulcers, extreme excess can cause death. The western tycoon and the African native were testimony enough.

From one treatise Joey learned that peptic ulcer can be cured by the use of histamine. From another book he discovered that histamine is antagonistic to adrenalin in the body. In the same book he read that both histamine and adrenalin could be produced excessively in the body by emotion.

Joey wondered—he knew he was on very strange ground—but he wondered—He wondered if a man with a peptic ulcer was made by someone else to feel some particular emotion, perhaps a feeling of deep serenity, would the ulcer disappear under a wash of

self-generated histamine? He wondered if the same theory could be taken further, and if other ailments could likewise be cured by the will of another person.

He was working on theory alone now. There was no proof for any of it. But with his innate sense of *fitness*, Joey knew he was on the right lines. And for the first time he knew who he was looking for and where to look.

Had Joey seen Dave Knox and Amethyst Jackson at that moment, he would have been gratified to learn how right he was.

Dave had packed in his job. With Amethyst fulfilling her promise to be the provider, he spent his days dealing with a steady stream of sick humanity. They, too, were provided by the girl. He didn't ask where she found them, but he suspected she took them off the streets.

The stream widened. People who had benefited from a visit to Dave's place told other people. His two-roomed apartment became too small to cope with the crowd. Once again Amethyst solved the problem; she rented a vacant shop. The windows were painted over and the shop became a consulting room.

Dave no longer quibbled about what he was doing. He had long wanted to devote himself to the healing of human ills. The necessity of earning his living had prevented

any large-scale activity in that direction. With Amethyst taking care of the food and lodgings he was free to pursue his dream.

Paradoxically, now that he had the time, the facilities and the clientele, he made no charge for his services. For one thing, he didn't need the money, and for another he wanted to keep on the right side of the law, which frowned on fee-taking by lay healers or faith healers.

Not that he called himself a faith healer. It was a term he had forbidden Amethyst to use.

"Faith doesn't come into it," he had said. "Oh, I know they trot off to Lourdes expecting a cure, and I know that people call that faith. But it is the wrong term. When pilgrims go there—or when people come to me here, for that matter—they think they will be cured. And I admit that their expectation is half the cure, but not because of their faith. What has happened is that they have already willed themselves better. Will—that's the correct word. And that will triggers the correct endocrine stimulation."

He used some of his clients to illustrate his point. There was the man who came into the shop, parchment-faced and strangling with asthma and who left with pink cheeks, erect back and deep, regular breathing.

"Twenty years of misery," Dave said, a touch of pride in his voice.

"And five minutes of pounding sense into him makes him whole."

"He had faith in you," said Amethyst.

"Faith! When I was a dispenser I met a lot of asthmatics. Most of them used throat sprays, solutions of adrenalin and similar chemicals. These sprays were expensive. Some of the patients were starving themselves to buy them. More than once I was asked to recommend something just as good but cheaper. I did. I sold them water. One-ounce bottles of water. Every one of those people said the new spray was better. That's because I really *sold* the water."

"Or because they had faith in you."

"Not at all. I convinced them—willed them, if you like—that spraying my solution into their throats would relieve their asthma. Today I can do it better, of course. I've had more practice. That asthmatic who just left won't be bothered again."

Since they had moved into the shop, Amethyst had bought a tape recorder and took recordings of Dave while he talked to his patients. She switched on the recorder now as she asked: "How can words cure a disease?"

"Asthma isn't a disease. It has a lot in common with hay fever and nettlerash. It is partly an allergy, and allergies are due to surplus self-generated histamine. All I did just now was to adjust

that man's way of thinking, to change his personality so that his adrenals produced enough adrenalin to counteract the histamine."

"But," said Amethyst, "what about the damage already done to his lungs through continual dilation of the air sacs?"

"His lungs will recover. His body will see to that."

Amethyst wanted elucidation. Dave took his explanation back to the beginning, back to regeneration. He used the old example of the worm cut in two, and the other of the lobster growing new claws.

"Low forms of life still possess full powers of regeneration. The higher the life form, the more the ability fades. But it persists, even in humans. For instance, we still heal when we cut ourselves. That is regeneration. It can take place on a bigger scale, if we let it; if we don't stop the process by wrong thinking. Did you know that there are little bones between our teeth? Did you know that, after teeth extraction, these tiny bones are absorbed by the tissues? That's what the body can do when it isn't interfered with."

Amethyst switched off the tape recorder. She said: "That means you *could* cure yourself."

Dave was silent.

"You said you could stop the progress of your osteo-arthritis but that you would still be cripple because of the spikelets of bone that have grown on the hip joints.

That doesn't agree with what you just said about dental bone."

"That's different," grunted Dave.

"Of course it's different!" Amethyst stormed. "It's different because you are afraid. It has taken me a long time to discover why you couldn't help your own disability. It's because you are afraid to try in case you fail. You—you who can bend other people to your will have no will-power of your own!"

Dave stopped the conversation by the simple procedure of opening the door that led to the part of the shop used as a waiting room.

"Who's next?" he asked of the seven people waiting.

"I think I am." Big, broad, hulking—a stevedore, docker, a muscle-man of some sort—the speaker had a little girl with him. "My kid's blind," he added.

"My boy is backward," said a woman. She said it in a whisper. Her child's condition was a mark of shame to her.

Another woman was crying quietly. She held a baby in her arms. Dave went to her first, with hardly a glance at the stout perspiring man who sat alone, apart from the others. He peeled the cover from the baby's face. He lifted his brows.

"What is your name?" he asked gently.

"Maxwell."

"Go home, Mrs. Maxwell. Your baby is dead, been dead for some time."

"No!"

"Yes. Stop trying to deceive yourself. The baby is dead. Face facts. Refusing to see them won't help. Go home, call a doctor. It will be better."

He ushered the woman to the door, hailed a passing cab and saw her off. When he came in he went straight to Amethyst.

"Can we afford another two hundred?" he asked bluntly.

Amethyst said they could and Dave took out his cheque-book, scribbled an entry and tore out the inscribed cheque. He folded it between two fingers and hobbled back to the waiting room. He went to the remaining woman. The round-faced child stared at him unintelligently. He gave the cheque to the mother.

"I can't work miracles," he said. "An operation on the thyroid is required. Get Sir Geoffrey Council. I think this cheque will be sufficient."

He beckoned the big man with the little girl to follow him out of the waiting room.

"How old is she? What's her name?" he asked.

"Mai. She's blind. Ever since her accident."

Dave asked the girl to come towards him. He transferred both sticks to one hand, held out the other and touched her waist to

guide her. He looked at her eyes. One was glazed, the eyebrow above it smeared and made almost hairless by an old scar. The other eye turned so far inwards that only the edge of the iris was visible, near the nose.

"What happened, Mai?"

"I was bad."

"She got burned," said her father. "I was burning garden rubbish. It was almost burned out. I went inside for cigarettes. When I was in the house she crawled up to the bonfire and——"

Dave stopped him. "I see. She was a baby at the time?"

"Two. That was four years ago."

"Two years old! And you left her near an unattended fire!"

"Only for a minute."

"A minute! A second would have been too long. What did the oculist say?"

"One eye was gone. He said the other might develop a squint. The shock, he said."

"That's quite a squint."

"She's blind."

"How much could *you* see with your eye in that position? Leave the room, please. Wait outside."

The glazed, milk-white eye was obviously beyond redemption. Dave gave it no more than a glance and studied the other eye closely.

"Can you see anything at all, Mai?" he asked.

"No. I'm blind. I'm blind because I was bad."

"Who told you that? Your daddie?"

"I don't remember. I think my daddie."

Dave's face darkened. "Did he say it was a punishment?"

"I was bad to go near the fire."

"What does your mummy say?"

"I haven't a mummy."

"Do you remember her?"

"Oh, yes!"

"Was she pretty?"

The girl's face was transformed. "She was the prettiest," she said simply.

"You're pretty, too, Mai." He was too soon. She wasn't prepared for it.

"No," she said. "My eyes——"

"Have you ever heard of a contact lens? It's a kind of plastic skin. One could be made to match the colour of the eye that wasn't burned. If you wore that lens, nobody would ever know that you had been burned."

Mai digested this. Then: "But my other eye . . . everybody says it hides behind my nose."

"It does. You must turn it out of there."

"I can't."

"Have you tried?"

"I used to, but it made my head ache."

"But it doesn't ache now?"

"No."

"When did it ache? Can you

remember? Just after your accident?"

"I think so. Yes."

Dave told her to sit quietly. He went to whisper to Amethyst who was watching the recorder spools revolve. She had recorded Dave's treatment of every case since they took over the shop.

"Amethyst," he said. "I don't think I'll ever understand the stupidity and witless cruelty of humans. It's obvious that her left eye is perfectly good. It squints, but it is good. Shock may have initiated the squint, but it has been aggravated by the perpetual talk of blindness and punishment."

"Her father?"

"Him. He has shifted the responsibility for the accident off his own shoulders onto the child's. By now he probably believes himself that it was her fault."

"Can you help her?"

"It is usually done surgically. One muscle is pulling too strongly, turning the eye inwards. A snip of that muscle and the eye swings forward naturally. I think surgery won't be necessary."

"Her squint is induced?"

"Definitely. All she has heard since the accident is that she will be blind. Right now she is blind. She's been made to feel guilty. Nervous tension has affected the pressure of the fluid inside the eyeball. That's why she can't see at all; the lens has been forced out

of focus. And the distended ball is more comfortable in its present position."

"She deliberately squints?"

"I doubt if she realises it, but yes. She had headaches, remember? So she found which position of her eye reduced the headaches most. Will you arrange with an oculist for a contact lens as I suggested? Meantime, go out and give the father the edge of your tongue while I talk to the kid."

Fifteen minutes may seem a short time in which to correct a defect of four years standing. But in quarter of an hour of superb morale-lifting, cajoling, commanding talk, Dave had convinced Mai that she would be able to see. Immediate restoration of vision was impossible, of course; it would take time for the pressure in the eyeball to subside. Yet, before she left, Dave was able to give Mai a glimpse of the future—only a slight forward turn of the eye and a kaleidoscope of blurry light and dark shapes, but it was a guarantee of what she could do if she tried.

Her father left a very chastened man.

The one remaining person in the waiting room, the little fat man, heaved himself regretfully out of his seat. Dave and Amethyst waited to hear his complaint.

"Name's Joey Simons," said the fat man. "Been chasing you

for many a day. Tell me, which of you is the alien?"

Amethyst looked at Dave. They both shrugged. "I am," said the girl.

Joey stuck his hands in his coat pockets. "I thought you would be. You know, young lady, you've had this planet of ours in quite a stir about your ship."

Amethyst frowned. "I left complete notes. What is the trouble? Why did the newspapers say the ship would not be used, that it was not to be trusted?"

"My bosses," said Joey, "they figured it like this: we don't have spaceships; but if we did, we certainly wouldn't dump one of them on a distant planet and say to the natives—go ahead, help yourselves. That's what you did. Frankly, it stinks."

The alien girl washed Joey with a look of cold contempt. "I thought you had a saying about never looking a gift horse in the mouth."

"That we have," Joey conceded. "And you knowing it only shows how much you've learned about us—a lot more than we've learned about you."

"Don't change the subject."

"I'm not. Let me counter the adage you quoted with another: when a poor man eats chicken, one of them is sick."

The girl who had taken the name of Amethyst Jackson frowned. She said: "I don't

understand what chickens have to do with my ship."

Joey clarified. "A poor farmer doesn't kill a chicken unless it is dying—or unless he is ill and needs the rich meat. Likewise, people from space don't give away spaceships and the secret of spaceflight unless the ships have a jinx."

Amethyst smiled understanding. "I see. Because you don't have spaceflight, you believe that spaceships are tremendously valuable—our chickens, if you like. It so happens that you are mistaken, but in any case we are not giving away my ship because there is anything wrong with it. It isn't the chicken that is sick, but us. I came seeking a cure for the sickness and the ship was my offering for a fair bargain."

Dave took up her story. He faced Joey. "She's telling the truth. She explained this to me some time ago."

"Try it on me. I may buy it—and again I may not."

"You will. You see, she isn't a monster, she didn't come here to enslave us, or even to sneer at our backwardness. She came for help. She came for human help, because that's what she is—human. The only difference between her and us is the difference there will be between our descendants and us. In a thousand years, or maybe five thousand, our race will be exactly like hers. Or it will be if

we don't heed the warning of what has happened to them."

"With spaceflight they seem to be doing fine," said Joey. He wasn't arguing, just prompting.

"Take Amethyst's offer and we can have spaceflight long before her people did."

"And the price?"

The girl answered that one herself. "It has been paid."

Dave broadened her statement. "We're heading for the same situation her people are in——"

"Which is?"

"Technical perfection but physical and mental degeneration. Without great care, these are almost complementary to each other. You can see the beginnings of the situation today. You have only to read the papers. Look at the spiralling rise in the use of sedatives and tranquilisers."

"You mean we're going sick?"

"I mean just that. A lizard can grow a new tail. We can't even develop a new attitude——"

Joey interrupted: "If you're leading up to a lecture on regeneration, skip it. I've been through all that on my way here."

Dave lifted his brows. "You must be very smart, Mister Simons."

"Not smart. Patient. And patience led me to you. When I found the signs and read them right, I figured all I had to do was look around for somebody who

had only recently taken up faith healing."

Dave let the last words pass. "Call it what you will, you can't deny there are still some people, like myself, for instance, who can do something about the new sickness."

"Would it be presumptuous of me to remind you that there are professionals?"

"The psychos? They do a good job. But without wishing to decry their efforts, I must say that they have something missing. Something that I have, something that a few other people have, something that is also possessed by places of pilgrimage. I can't think of one embracing word for it. Personality would do for the human element. I don't know what you would call it in the case of Lourdes."

Joey nodded. "I'll accept personality. Now tell me if I've got it right. You say that these aliens have a severe case of psychosomatic illness, they are plagued by self-induced disabilities as some of us are. You also say that this sickness can be cured in a similar way to its cause—by attacking it through the mind. And the sum of your conclusions is that the cure must be effected in a plethora of showmanship."

Dave grinned. "The words are yours, but you've got the idea."

"In that case," said Joey. "Why don't you cast away those sticks?"

Amethyst spoke. She asked: "How well did you examine the ship?"

"We didn't. Nothing was touched but the notes."

"A pity! There are recordings and films. If these had been used our plight would have been obvious and you would not be doubting me now."

"What's on the films?"

"A complete picture of our plight. A picture of people with too much leisure destroying themselves with neurotically induced pains."

"You look fine to me."

"I'm a sport, a throwback. They don't come like me today. I was probably the only person with sufficient balance to survive the solitude of the journey. And I was sufficiently primitive to be able to mix with you unseen; even to haunt one of your libraries without discovery."

Joey thought she was telling the truth. "You implied you had got what you came for. I take it that means Knox has shown you how to cure neuroses?"

Amethyst gave an affirmative nod.

"Then, why is *he* a cripple?"

"The most difficult person to convince about anything is one's self. Dave can't perform his own cure. But maybe I could. I've learned a lot from Dave."

Joey took her up on her statement. "Go ahead. Let me

see you do it." Then, as she hesitated. "Go on, girl. I still need proof."

Amethyst stood before Dave. She said: "There was a time when I thought it would be nice to take you back home with me. But when I saw how Bernard reacted to your lameness, I changed my mind. You might have had the same effect on my people."

"I can't be otherwise. I've explained so often."

"Yes. So often. You have osteoarthritis in both hips. The surface of each trochanter is deteriorated. Nature has done its best to renew the bones but the new material is in spikes which dig into the tissue and give you agony."

"You make me sound like a moaner."

"I'm sorry, Dave. But you haven't tried. Not hard enough."

She dropped her hands below her waist and moved close. "How much do you want me, Dave?"

"You—you're all I want."

"Forgive me for this," she whispered. She moved her hands stealthily. With a swiping motion, she knocked Dave's sticks from under him. "Come for me, Dave!"

The tears poured over her cheeks as she watched him. He was deathly white. On his upper lip, beads of sweat appeared like condensation on a window. His eyes strained forward. His hands clawed for support. Needles of

bone pierced tender tissues inside his hip joints. He tried to move, to relieve the terrible pain. But movement was only greater agony. He dared not even sway. His eyes lifted to the ceiling, seeking non-existent relief. He lifted clenched fists to his mouth.

"Dave!"

The girl's cry was a crutch. He swivelled wild eyes towards her. He peeled back his lips. His teeth didn't part.

"Dave, please! Walk. Walk to me. You can, you can. Walk!"

He mouthed imprecations. "I'll kill you," he gritted. "I'll kill you."

Joey watched in silence. He thought a man could be hung for the murder in Dave's eyes.

Dave moved. Slow, stiff, stilted. His legs swung in arcs but they carried him forward. Amethyst stepped back. Dave's legs moved faster. The swing was straighter. His shoulders came out of their hunch.

"Come on, Dave." The girl moved away, keeping a constant distance from him.

He caught her with her back to the wall. He moved bunched fists. Inches from her face he spread his fingers—and didn't hit her.

Trembling, Amethyst watched the emotions chasing across his face. She saw the rage and anger subside, giving way to disbelief and finally to joy.

"Dave?" she asked.

"It's all right," he said. "It's all right!"

Joey addressed Amethyst. "You've proved your point, girl."

"I hated doing it that way."

"What are your plans now?"

"If you don't mind, I would like to go home, with Dave. I can wait until your scientists have done what I invited them to do; until they can build a ship like mine."

Joey moved to the door. "I can't make any promises," he said. "But after I put in my report, I don't think we'll detain you for long. On my own behalf, my apologies for doubting you. On the behalf of our people, my apologies for what must seem to you like animal distrust."

His last words, just as he left, were: "Bon voyage—when the time comes."

Dave pulled Amethyst to him. He looked down at her upturned face. "We won't be idle. There is still a lot I have to teach you yet. And if I'm going to be useful—out there—well, I'd better get in as much practice as I can."

"Yes, Dave." She snuggled closer. "You know who I want you to start with?"

"I know. Little Bernard."

She wriggled out of his arms. "I'll go get him."

Dave caught her arm. "Wait for me. I'm coming with you." He kicked the sticks into a corner as he went to fetch his coat.

Metamorphosis

by J. S. HUEGH

*Back in the old days, so legends tell us,
Gods walked the Earth. Gods—or survivors?*

THE Eastbase Observation Station was well situated.

Cut by the constructors' heat-carvers out of the solid rock face just below the mountain peak, the artificial ledge with its boundary wall, cave-like living quarters, laboratory and workshops, was completely invisible from further down the mountain-side. The gleaming silver receiving and transmitting discs—my special concern as communications officer—were scarcely brighter in the early sunlight than the snow on the main summit, where they were mounted above and to the north of us.

I hadn't slept well. That was why I was out of the quarters at this early hour, leaning over the cool, smooth stone of the parapet, looking out across the dark pines

which clothed the mountain's flanks.

"Can't you sleep either?"

I swung around to see the familiar, cheerfully ugly face of the Chief.

"What's on your mind?"

I shrugged. "I suppose I'm over-tired. I've checked and double-checked, and I'm sure as can be that everything has been done that could be done. But it's such a big thing and, although we're all right, and so are North, South and West Bases, it's Homebase who's on the doing end. They initiate the process, and we just sit tight and follow instructions. I'm a bit uneasy, sir."

The Chief threw back his head with a bark of laughter.

"I'm scared stiff, myself! It's not every day that an entirely new

source of power is tapped. Two things can happen. It might be a feeble flop, or we may split the whole damn world in two like an apple."

He went off into roars of laughter, but I wasn't deceived. Neither were other members of our group, now coming out of the quarters, who turned their heads in our direction to glance cautiously at the Chief's forced mirth.

When he sobered he turned to me, condemning with one sweeping gesture the whole glorious vista.

"I shall be glad when we get out of this perishing hole," he said quietly. "Give me the comforts of civilisation any day. This place is spectacular, I'll admit, but the natives are not particularly friendly."

"No wonder, Chief," I cut in. "You've scared the daylight out of them. When we first came in from the coast with our levitators they thought we were gods because we could fly. Remember the dances and sacrifices that night? And now, they think you're the king of the gods because you chuck thunderbolts at them!"

He grinned. "Never hurt any of 'em yet. Besides, we don't want them too close for the good of their health, and it's handy having them supplement our satis-

factory, but to say the least of it, unappetising, diet of synthetics. Incidentally——" he pointed down the cliff to the forest's edge "——I see there's another goat and a wine skin on the white rock down there."

He pulled out his heat-gun and, glancing at me with a sparkle of mischief, aimed it at a dead, skeletal pine beside the natives' offering. There was the usual hiss and crack as he fired, then the tree burst into smoking fragments.

Instantly, with a scurrying slide of scree, two startled skin-clad figures bounded out of a clump of bushes and fairly hurtled down into the forest, while the Chief almost fell over the balcony in his enjoyment of this richly amusing joke. Then, pulling himself together, he re-holstered his gun, wiped his eyes and glanced at the time-counter on his wrist.

"Right," he said. "Final conference. Come on, Signals."

We all gathered at the sunnier end of the rock-shelf, and the Chief, perching himself on the parapet, opened proceedings.

"The time has now come for us to let loose a new kind of energy on Earth. As we all know well, at home a small 'Breaker,' as the laymen call it, has been working for some time producing a

small amount of light and heat energy. But today, in"—he glanced at his time-counter—"a very short time, the main Ripple-reactor will be started. This will begin a continuous increase process which it is estimated will build up in ten pulses sufficient energy to activate simultaneously the four power-systems at Northbase, Southbase, Westbase, and here at Eastbase. This energy needs to be exactly limited and directed—hence the careful surveying and positioning of the four bases at fixed heights, distances and bearings from the Reactor. Today's experiment is in the nature of an extremely delicate and exact test of the whole process, and any inaccuracy, however slight, will cause a dismal failure all round."

He paused.

"There have been suggestions by some of our alarmist friends at home that there is a danger of the process running amok. I don't think there's much fear of that. After all, the Reactor is remotely controlled and situated in an artificial island in the Central Lake. We'll be all right here if anything should go wrong there."

He grinned around at us suddenly dispelling the rather solemn epoch-making atmosphere he had built up.

"Well, that's the official speech

over. Any questions? You, Signals? Anybody? Yes—Cookie, what is it?"

Cookie, a fat, sleepy-looking individual, whose only sorrow was serving synthetic food, and who delighted in preparing for us mouth-watering dishes from the fortuitous food left by the natives, had waved a leisurely hand.

"How soon can we get home, Chief? I'm wasting my talents on this manufactured muck."

"It won't be long now. Take another turn in your girdle. Any more questions? Right. Five centipulses to go. Everybody stand to."

We moved off through the arched doorway cut out of the cliff face into the main control room. There, in the cool semi-darkness, I slid into my seat in front of my apparatus. The engineers, checkers and recorders were in their places, and everyone else not actively concerned with the operation seemed to be leaning over my shoulder and breathing down my neck. The Chief lowered himself into the control seat at my side, and sat statue-still as I energised my scanner-screen, and adjusted the mirror-link which brought into view through the window opening the main power reflector on the peak above the signals discs.

No one spoke. There was silence except for the soft purr of our power unit releasing its stored solar energy.

The Chief stared at the main time-counter dial as the figures pulsed into view.

"One centipulse. Switch in scanner, energise sound-line."

The blue glow of the scanner-screen faded, and came up rosy and warm. And then we saw in clear miniature Homebase on the plateau, above Central Lake, with its domed artificial island. Beyond the lake, the Mountains of the Rim were catching the first gleams of the rising sun.

Through the sound-ring on my head and simultaneously over the amplifier came the voice from Homebase Control counting the remaining pulses.

"Ten—nine—eight——"

I stretched out my hand for the transfer switch that would shift over the equipment from solar power to Ripple-energy.

"——Seven—six—five——"

The sound of our breathing seemed to fill the room—hoarsely in unison.

"——Four—three—two——"

Holding the switch, I looked in the mirror at the image of the power reflector.

"——One—Zero!"

I pressed the switch. The counting voice went on, ghostly faint at first, then growing stronger.

"——Plus one—plus two—plus three——" as the power reflector began to glow, silvery-gold, orange-gold, red-gold.

"——Plus four—plus five——"

A shrieking hiss through the sound-ring nearly burst my ears. The power reflector seemed to blaze and blossom with a searing violet light and then—vanished!

For a timeless instant there was absolute silence and darkness. Then a mad gabble of meaningless voices, my companions' and my own, filled the air.

Instinctively, I punched the transfer switch, and as the solar power came on again the screen glowed and the shrill cacophony increased in volume as the sounds were duplicated over the hearing-ring from Homebase. The picture came slowly back into focus.

The Dome was writhing and shimmering as had the power reflector—then a blinding light filled the screen, illuminating the ring of watching faces in their fierce ugliness of stark horror.

As we watched in dreadful fascination the lake appeared to boil and puff into nothingness in a vast cloud of steam. The land around its shore cracked and

heaved and *bubbled*. Sound died, and just before the screen went blank I felt, rather than saw, the Mountains of the Rim crumble down upon themselves as a mighty wall of water took their place on the horizon.

The Chief snatched the sound-ring from my head and jammed it on his own, and I shall never forget the dry harshness of his voice, all his humanity gone, as he spoke into the mouthpiece.

"Homebase, Homebase—Atlantis, Atlantis, can you hear me . . . ? Olympus Base calling Atlantis . . . Zeus speaking from Olympus Base . . ."

His voice died away.

Slowly, he handed back the sound-ring. He looked, somehow, a thin old man.

"Hermes," he said to me slowly and quietly. "I don't suppose the cross-link is still working, but see if you can contact the other bases for me. Try Northbase first."

I put on the ring and pressed the transmitter switch.

"Zeus calling Odin . . ."

"Zeus calling Odin . . ."

There was no reply. We have had none since.

But experiments still go on. And the Chief is more like his old self. Even my hopes are building up again.

FORECAST

Stanson was the one with the Great Idea; Learchy the man of iron who believed in action, not words; Klien with the intelligent fingers and a depression only alcohol could cure; Lorna, waif of the Tycho slums. Four people living in the 22nd century, a time of ruthless extremes where only the strong could survive and money spelled happiness. **THERE'S ONLY ONE WINNER**, by Nigel Lloyd, shows what happens when four desperate people ride a blood-stained trail across the stars—a path leading to incredible riches. A long action-packed story filled with grimly logical situations.

MY NAME IS MACNAMARA, by Robert Presslie, concerns itself of the strange awakening of a man who finally came to realise that his name really meant something.

THE LAST OLD MAID, by John Cotterill, is a thought-provoking tale about the last determined spinster. A pity that she just couldn't resist buying new machines.

A PROBLEM IN PSIONICS, by Edward Mackin, will make you smile at the efforts of a self-admitted genius who operates on a diet of cherry pie and unpaid debts.

GRDZLE, by Ken Wainwright, answers itself. What is a Grdzle? You'd be surprised.

COLLECTING TEAM, by Robert Silverberg, tells of the planet which seemed to be a zoological paradise—which goes to prove that things aren't always exactly what they seem.

DARK REFLECTION

by A. BERTRAM CHANDLER

A mirror is a harmless thing—but not when you see more than you bargain for. The truth, for example—the real truth.

“YOU’RE SURE that you’ll be all right?” asked Captain Craig again. “Is there anything more that I can do?”

“We’ll be all right,” said Kennedy firmly. “And thanks, captain, for all that you have done for us already.”

“It was very good of you,” said Mrs. Kennedy.

“It was the least that I could do,” replied the shipmaster, “to send a work squad to get the place cleaned up. It was a shock to all of us to find such a mess—a man all of six weeks dead, and a crazy woman . . .”

Ann Kennedy shuddered. “I’d rather not talk about it, captain. After all—we have to live here for six months.”

“You don’t have to, Ann,” said her husband. “After all, the Company only recommends that Traders have their wives with them . . .”

“There’s a passage back to Earth for you,” said the captain.

“No,” said the girl. “This is a Class A planet, and supposed to be safe. The fact that a neurotic

woman goes crazy and then murders her husband doesn’t make it any less safe . . . But if this were a Class B, or even a Class C planet, I’d still stay.”

“Class B or Class C—we’d have a squad of the Company’s Marines to look after us,” said Kennedy.

“I have to go,” said the captain, looking at his wrist watch. “I’ll be back in six months with another load of trade goods, and your reliefs. Until then—look after yourself, Kennedy. And look after the lady.”

“I’ll do that,” said Kennedy.

They shook hands, and then the captain strode briskly from the room. From the window they watched him, watched him walking to the gleaming tower that was his ship. The cargo booms had been withdrawn into her sleek sides, the conveyor belts had been pulled away and clear. Only one door remained open, that of the main airlock. The ramp leading down from it started retracting even as Craig was climbing it, the great door shut hard on the heels of his sturdy figure.



The siren screamed. Kennedy and his wife could see the squat, grey Khannan labourers scuttling into the blast-proof shelters. The siren screamed again, and a third time—the traditional signal of farewell.

"Want to watch, darling?" asked Kennedy.

"Yes," she said.

Kennedy touched a switch at the window frame, and the filters slid into place. The room was dark, then, with most of the dull crimson daylight shut out. It was dark until the blue flame blossomed under the stern of the interstellar ship, until she lifted, a fantastic tower balanced improbably on a long column of blue incandescence, on rolling billows of steam. She lifted—slowly at first and then with increasing speed, vanishing into the overcast. The diminishing thunders of her passing rumbled down from above the thick clouds.

"That," said Kennedy flatly, "is that. You're marooned now—alone on a desert planet with the big, bad wolf!" He grinned, showing his teeth. "It's no use screaming for help, darling."

"I know it's not," she said. "No, Jim, no—not now. It's all very well for you—you've travelled—but I've never been off Earth before, not even to Mars, or the Moon. I want to see what this place is like."

"Grim," he said. "But very.

You have to be a Senior Trader to get one of the paradise planets. But I forgot that you've been too busy getting things shipshape to look around. We can't see much from this room—only the space-port. Come through into the bedroom."

It was at night that *Lone Star* had set down on Khanna. The Kennedys had walked from the ship to the Station in a chill drizzle, had seen nothing but the muddy footpath that they were treading. They had found, in the living quarters, the dead body of Masters, Kennedy's predecessor. They had found the gibbering, screaming thing that had been Masters' wife. They had been appalled by the disorder, the filth. They had noticed—but only as a very minor detail—that every window had been coated on the inside with dull paint. The cleaning off of this paint had been the last task performed by Captain Craig's work party.

Kennedy pulled aside the curtains with a flourish.

"Look," he said. "Look and weep!"

"I feel rather like weeping," said his wife.

She stood by her husband, and together they stared out over the dreary scene. The lurid sky burned sullenly over a landscape whose predominant colours were a green so dark as almost to

be black, and grey. Save for one range of mountains, etched in sharp black silhouette against the smouldering sky, there were no hills, only gentle undulations between which wound the broad, slow rivers, among which stood the placid meres, each of which reflected the sullen crimson of the overcast.

"Doesn't the sun ever shine here?" she asked.

"No," he said. "You saw your last of Arcturus—for six months, that is—when *Lone Star* dropped down into the atmosphere. But we'll survive it—the six months and the lack of sunshine, I mean. We have our UV lamp. We'll always be warm and dry inside the Station."

"When do we start work?" she asked. "You must think me horribly unpractical, darling—after all, I'm a Trader's wife . . ."

"And you've been working like a slave getting this place cleaned up. Well—the set-up is this. Our first day here we spend getting settled in. Tomorrow morning the interpreter will call—he must live in that village there, by the river—and we set up shop. There's a list of prices—if you can call them that when everything is done by barter—in the store. We stick to them as closely as possible. Of course, we have to make allowances when anything is in short supply—there's a blight, for example, that affects

the honey reed, and there are insect pests that destroy the berry crop. But you've read all that on the way here."

"I have," she said. "And I know that the main articles of trade are electric torches and batteries, and cutlery of various kinds, and mirrors. Especially mirrors. Why mirrors, I wonder?"

"That I don't know. Once the Company gets its claws into a planet it warns off archæologists, ethnologists and anybody else liable to upset the natives. Very little is known about the Khannans. They aren't vicious—that's why this is a Class A world. They don't believe in social intercourse with aliens—and that's why it's considered suitable for Junior Traders and their wives. There'll be no presiding at your dinner table, darling, being gracious to bug-eyed monstrosities—not on this planet, anyhow."

"If we'd been married longer I might resent that, Jim," she replied, a smile brightening her thin, serious face. "But, talking of dinner, it's time that I started to prepare our first meal in our new home."

They had slept well, and had breakfasted well, when the door chimes announced that somebody was waiting outside. Kennedy pressed the button that activated the viewer, watched the swirling lines and colours coalesce into a

picture of the being who had called on them.

"Like a penguin!" cried Ann. "Like a fat grey penguin with an owl's face! I think I'm going to like these Khannans!"

"It must be the interpreter," said Kennedy.

He got up from the table, walked along the passage to the door. His wife followed him.

Jim Kennedy opened the door. The Khannan bowed ridiculously, once to him and once to Ann.

"'Ood mornin'," he said. "I am 'alled Mernoo. I interpret."

"Good morning," replied Kennedy. "My name is Kennedy. This is my wife, Mrs. Kennedy."

Automatically he extended his hand. The Khannan took it in his own. Kennedy realised then that the avian appearance of the natives was misleading, that they were, in fact, essentially humanoid. Penguins do not have hands at the ends of their flippers.

"Mr. 'Ennedy," squeaked Mernoo, "we open store now?"

"Yes," said Kennedy. "Coming, Ann? The dishes can wait."

It was cold outside the living quarters, a dank, penetrating chill. By the time that the humans had walked the short distance from the living quarters to the store they had begun to envy the native's snug pelt of water-repellent fur. Outside the low shed in which the trading was carried out a half dozen or so of natives was waiting.

They greeted Mernoo, looked incuriously at the Earthman and Earthwoman.

The door of the store had no lock—crime, as the Handbook pointed out, was unknown on Khanna. Mernoo hurried ahead and opened up, switched on the lights. He scurried behind the long counter, set out chairs for the Trader and his wife. As he sat down, Kennedy felt absurdly important.

The first native came in. He carried a basket of crimson, acrid smelling berries. He engaged in a long and animated conversation with Mernoo. It sounded, thought Kennedy, like the almost supersonic chittering of two bats.

"Lewa berries," whispered Kennedy to Ann. "Rather important back on Earth for the manufacture of anti-biotics . . ."

"'Ive him one torsh, two mirrors," said Mernoo. "Bi' ones."

Kennedy looked at his list. One torch, two big mirrors for one basket of lewa berries . . . Average price—two torches or four big mirrors a basket . . . Fair enough.

"All right," he said.

He made the entry in his ledger while the little interpreter went to the back of the store, returned carrying the torch and the two mirrors, each about three feet by two. He put the goods down on the counter, then picked up the torch and demonstrated that it

was in working order. Then he held up one of the mirrors. The customer stared into it, then gravely bowed to his own reflection.

"Mernoo," asked Ann, "is this some custom of your people?"

"Yes, Mrs. 'Enneddy. Old custom. We salute self."

The Khannan picked up his purchases and left. Two more customers came in, carrying between them a bale of honey reed. They took in exchange machetes, electric torches and, once again, mirrors.

So the morning went on. At noon the Kennedys shut up shop, walked back to their house for the lunch break.

"What do you make of it, Ann?" asked Kennedy.

"It's all rather fascinating. A strange world, strange people. And here's one of the strangest things, Jim. These people can't say a hard "g" or "k"—and yet the name for their world is Khanna. How come?"

"*Their* name for this world isn't Khanna," laughed Kennedy. "We call it Khanna because it was so named by the captain of the survey ship *Genghis Khan* . . ."

"And this business of the mirrors," she said. "Mernoo's as bad as the others. Did you notice the little stiff bow that he made to his own reflection every time that he got a mirror out from

stock, every time that he saw his own reflection in one of the windows . . .?"

"The windows," said Kennedy. "That could be significant."

"What do you mean?" she asked.

"I'm not sure, yet," he replied. "We'll talk about it tonight, after dinner."

"I think I see what you're driving at," she said. "But it will keep."

They finished their lunch and returned to the store.

The afternoon's work was no more arduous than the forenoon's employment—but it was, still, interesting. Kennedy found that all the Khannans did not, as he had first thought, look and sound alike. There were subtle variations in the colours of the pelts, the eyes; there were differences in the shapes of the small, beaky noses and the little, almost round mouths beneath. Some of the natives had higher pitched voices than others, some talked faster. Some showed a slight—but only a slight—tendency to haggle, others took without question the trade goods offered for their wares.

In the middle of the afternoon Mernoo made them a pot of tea and then, rather to the astonishment of his employers, joined them in the break for refreshment.

"Why are you surprised?" he piped. "There is difference of form between us—but small dif-

ference. Our bodily 'emistry is the same. You 'an eat our food, we 'an eat yours. Eat, and li'."

"I'm sorry, Mernoo," said Ann. "But, you see, I've never been off Earth before. Oh, I've seen beings from other worlds who've been visiting Earth—but I've never sat down to table with them."

"You can hardly call a counter a table, darling," said Kennedy dryly.

"Oh, shut up, Jim. You know what I mean." She turned away from him to speak again to Mernoo, but the interpreter had picked up the tea things and taken them to the back of the store to wash up.

They were busy after this, and the time for shutting up shop was upon them before they realised it. Swiftly and efficiently Mernoo put things away while the Kennedys made the last entries in their ledgers. He waited until they had shut the books, then bowed to them jerkily.

"You wish me to remain?" he asked. It was plainly a ritual question.

"No, thank you, Mernoo," said Kennedy.

Husband and wife walked from the store to the living quarters. The air was damp and raw. A crimson twilight brooded over the depressing landscape.

"I don't like it, Jim," shuddered Ann. "It's like an artist's vision

of what Earth will be like when the Sun is old and dying . . ."

He laughed. "By the time *our* sun reaches the red stage there won't be enough moisture left in the air for one little cloud—let alone a thick overcast!"

They showered, appreciating the hot water. They changed into comfortable lounging clothing. They left the preparation of dinner to the autochef. When they were fed they sat down before their blazing fire.

"Now," said Ann, "what was this mystery that you were hinting at? Something to do with windows and mirrors."

"A window is a mirror," replied Kennedy, "especially at night. Mrs Masters painted over all the windows in the house—on the *inside*. You must have noticed, too, that Captain Craig had to supply a new mirror for our bedroom. And the bathroom."

"He had to supply so much that was new," said the girl. "If the ship hadn't carried furniture among her other cargo we'd have had to sleep on the floor."

"All the same," said Kennedy, "there's something odd about this mirror business. I wish I'd known Masters better. We were shipmates for just one trip—we were cadets together in the old *Pole Star*."

"Emily Masters and I worked together in the Company's office,"

murmured Ann. "I never got to know her really well. She didn't mix much with the other girls . . ."

"Masters was normal enough," said her husband. "He was as ready to join in a session of hell-raising as any of us. He liked the Deep Space life—I was rather surprised to learn that he'd left the astronautical branch of the Company to become a Trader."

"I suppose that a few of *your* old shipmates felt the same way about you. Never underestimate the power of a woman . . ."

"I don't," he said, kissing her.

"Be serious, Jim!" she managed to gasp at last. "Let me go—you *beast!* Now, that's better. Now we can go on talking. We seem to have arrived at a choice between two theories." Gravely she ticked them off on her fingers. "(1) Emily Masters had a thing about mirrors, and then up and cut her husband's throat; (2) Emily Masters up and cut her husband's throat—and then had a thing about mirrors. It's possible you know. In her saner moments she must have realised that she was a murderess and could not bear the sight of her own reflected image."

"But why *was* she a murderess?" asked Kennedy. "We know that she was—she told everybody from the ship that she'd killed her husband, and there was enough evidence there for the Master-at-Arms to reconstruct the crime.

We know that she *did*—but we don't know *why*."

"It's not everybody who can live on a desert island," said Ann. "It's not everybody who can live on a desert island with only one other human being for company. They got on each other's nerves. They quarrelled. They quarrelled once too often."

"Could be . . . But, they must have gone through the same tests as we did. If there were any latent incompatibility the head shrinkers would have spotted it."

"Not necessarily," she said. "It may have been something pretty deep—too deep, even, for modern psychiatry. And something, some sudden strain, may have brought it to the surface."

"Some *sudden* strain," said Kennedy. "There's the rub. There's no likelihood of any sudden strain here. The climate, such as it is, is equable; there are no violent storms. The natives may not be friendly—but they certainly aren't hostile."

"The natives," she said softly. "They may know something. They must know something—Mernoo especially."

"We'll ask him tomorrow," said Kennedy.

They asked him during a slack period in the middle of the forenoon.

"Mernoo," said Kennedy, "do you know why Mr. Masters was killed?"

"Yes," said the interpreter simply.

Kennedy exploded. "Then why didn't you come forward when the ship was in? Why didn't you tell your story to Captain Craig?"

"I was not as'ed," said the native.

"All right. You weren't asked. You should have been. *Why did Mrs. Masters kill Masters?*"

"They were on the Hill of Truth," said Mernoo. "The Hill of Truth is no mystery. You Earth people do not know about it be'ause you have never as'ed. They were on the Hill of Truth. They learned the truth. And it was too much for them."

"They must have broken the Company's rules," said Kennedy. "We are supposed never to interfere in any native religious ceremony."

"They did not interfere. How 'ould they? There was no ceremony."

"But what happened?" asked Ann.

"They learned the truth."

"*What happened?*" shouted Kennedy.

"Mr. 'Ennedy, my people are not scientists or engineers. In many ways—in all ways, perhaps—we feel rather than know. We do not demand *Why?* Something is so—and that is all that matters. You wish to go to the Hill of Truth? I will show you." He walked to the window, ex-

tended one flipperlike arm in the direction of the distant range of mountains. "The sharp one, standing alone—that is the Hill of Truth. There is a flatness at its top, where you may stand, where you may land your flying machine. For two days the wind must blow from the west without ceasing. On the third day it must blow from the south. Then, before sunset, you must stand on the hill. Then, perhaps, you will learn the truth . . ."

"What *is* this truth?" demanded Ann.

"For every person it is different. But once you have learned it you may see it in any mirror. Before the Earthmen landed we had to be satisfied with polished metal, with the still surface of rivers and pools. Now it is easier."

Kennedy turned to his wife.

"Dare we?" he asked simply.

"Dare we not?" she replied.

"Look after the store, Ann," he said. "I'm going to check the helicopter."

For two days the wind blew from the west—a cold wind, damp, depressing. The Kennedys were glad of their blazing open fire, were glad of the UV lamp that served them in lieu of sunlight. They both hoped and feared that the wind would change on the third day.

It did, in the early hours of the morning, bringing with it a torren-

tial downpour that awakened the Kennedys. Kennedy went outside, gasped when the wet warmth hit him. The wind was from the south.

Neither of them slept any more. Kennedy was, he admitted, a little frightened. He had no wish to die as Masters had died—still less had he any wish that Ann should be removed from this planet, screaming and raving, in a strait jacket.

"You have to believe that we are strong enough to take it—whatever it is," said Ann. "We have to find out what it's all about. We'll never forgive ourselves if we don't."

"On the other hand," said Kennedy, "we have to admit that there's a certain risk involved—and we have a duty to the Company."

"Damn the Company," she said. "Anyhow—we'll be doing them a favour. They'll know, in future, what sort of people should not be sent here, and what sort should."

"Suppose we're the sort that shouldn't?" said Kennedy.

"That," she said, "we shall find out."

Dawn came—a dim ruddiness behind the driving sheets of rain. The time came for the store to be opened. Mernoo was there, the water dripping from his pelt.

"Will this rain stop?" asked

Kennedy. "This is no flying weather."

"Yes. It will stop—by noon at the latest. But perhaps the wind will change."

The wind did not change.

Mernoo was left in charge of the store—there had been very few customers that day. Kennedy and Ann pushed the little helicopter out from its shed.

The wind was still warm, was still blowing strongly and steadily from the equatorial regions, but it was a dry wind now. The westering sun was a ruddy, almost clearly defined ball behind the overcast—and the overcast was no longer a sullen crimson but a pearly grey flushed ever so slightly with pink. The mountains loomed huge to the westward—it seemed to Kennedy that he could almost stretch out his hand to touch them, although he knew that they were two hours flying time away.

Mernoo came out from the store.

"Two are strong," he said, "when two are one."

He lifted an arm in farewell.

Kennedy helped Ann into the cabin of the helicopter, followed her, shut the door. The little jet units at the tips of the rotor vanes spurted flame. The ship lifted.

Man and wife were silent as they flew over the undulant country—over the dark forests,

the marshes, the lakes and the winding rivers. Kennedy set his course for the sharp, isolated peak, handling the controls himself all the way instead of switching over to automatic.

At last they were over the peak. There was, as Mernoo had told them, a flat top to it, and this natural platform was crowded with grey-furred Khannans. The natives looked up as they heard the helicopter, cleared a space for it to land. Kennedy set the ship down gently, carefully. He climbed down from the cabin, helped Ann out.

The natives showed no surprise at seeing the Earthlings there, no resentment. A few of them in their near vicinity made absurdly stiff little bows, but that was all. Kennedy nodded in reply.

"What happens now?" asked Ann.

"I don't know," he said. "*They* are all looking to the east—I suppose that we do the same."

He thought, there's a tension here. I can feel it. There's this feeling that we are waiting for the moment of revelation, the moment of truth . . .

He pressed Ann's hand.

To the eastward the sky was changing. The faint pink darkened to a delicate mauve, then deepened to blue. There were blue shadows shifting, blue shadows

lifting, and beyond them an infinity deeper even than that known to the voyagers of Deep Space; and there was the wordless humming of the natives on the mountain top, a monotonous rhythm to which the shadows shifted, shifted—plane beyond plane, plane after plane, and beyond them the infinity . . .

. . . And beyond them the mountain top, and the people, and even the queer, incongruous shape of the helicopter.

A mirage, thought Kennedy. Only a mirage . . .

Yet it was more, much more, and he tightened his grasp on his wife's hand.

Then the image of the mountain top was gone, and facing them was the reflection of two people, of two people only—themselves. Two people hand in hand in the indigo darkness, against the darkness.

Kennedy raised his right hand.

It was then, when he saw the hands of his reflection remain motionless, that he began to feel really afraid.

The images were wavering, shifting, as the shadows had done. They . . . divided. It was no longer two people facing them, but a crowd. There was the tall old man, white robed, white bearded, somehow terrible, who still looked like Kennedy. There was the other, similar figure who

looked like Ann. There was the small boy, frightened, snivelling—and the small girl who stared back at them with frank appraisal.

And there were the animals . . .

Kennedy stared at the lean and hungry tom cat, his prowling libido, and felt a spasm of disgust. A wolf would not have been so bad—although bad enough. He saw the beast sidle up to the sleek Siamese that was, somehow, Ann, saw and sensed that the well-cared-for-animal did not resent the advances of the unkempt male. In the mirage the two children watched the mating of the cats with interest and . . . and pleasure. The old men made as though to intervene, were driven back by idealised images of Ann and Kennedy themselves.

Other images were there, too—parents, teachers long dead, even fictional characters from books and plays, and films—shifting and changing, shifting and, at the end, coalescing.

Ann and Kennedy stood on the mountain top staring into the darkness. The night had fallen, and the wind was no longer warm. Around them they heard the high pitched murmurings of the Khannans as, by ones and twos, they left the plateau, began making their way down the steep, narrow tracks to the plains below.

"What are you waiting for?" asked Ann at last. "Are you remembering *Alice in Wonder-*

land? Do you expect to see a phantom grin, like that of the Cheshire Cat, hanging in the darkness?"

He said: "I think I know what happened to Masters and his wife. Masters had normal tastes and appetites . . ."

"And poor Emily didn't—or thought she didn't," she finished.

"And when she found that she had, after all—she blamed him . . ." Kennedy shuddered as he thought of one of the white-robed, white bearded old men urging Emily Masters to use the knife. "This," he said hesitantly, "hasn't made any difference to us, has it?"

She squeezed his hand. "Of course not. I even liked the small boy."

Together they climbed into the helicopter, lifted from the mountain top, set their course for the flashing beacon that marked the Station. They said little during their flight. Each knew that it would be some little time before they would feel the need for speech again.

They landed, wheeled the machine into its shed. They walked to the house. Ann was first into the bedroom; Kennedy arrived just in time to see her slip off one of her heavy shoes and, with the heel of it, smash the long mirror.

He was suddenly afraid.



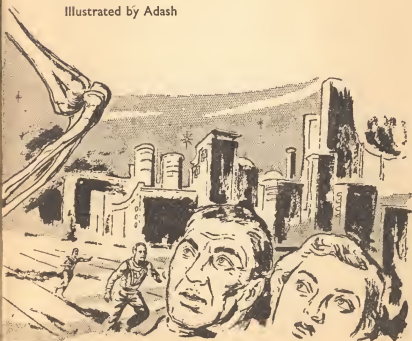
DEAD WEIGHT

by DOUGLAS WEST

Twenty million people were trapped in the city together with the invisible killer. Their only hope was to stay put; the only way to make them obey was to shoot to kill.

CONCLUSION

Illustrated by Adash



SYNOPSIS

THE WORLD in 2052 was not an easy place in which to live.

Ninety-five years earlier Doctor Blue had perfected his longevity treatment and gave to humanity a potential immortality, but his treatment had done nothing to increase food production or to gain more living space. Cities were rabbit warrens, food was scarce and the uneasy compromise with the old social order was breaking down. To safeguard the younger generations all Blues were declared legally dead, and from the moment of taking the treatment had to live on their accumulated wealth or rely on the charity of their families. The growing dead weight of these non-productive consumers was getting out of hand both in the Occident and in the Orient, where legal death was ignored and the population had increased at a fantastic rate.

Sam Falkirk, Captain of the World Police and stationed at the World Council building in New York, has a special interest in the sudden and inexplicable death of Angelo Augustine, a messenger employed by the Council. Augustine was also a spy in the pay of Senator Rayburn, a fanatical Nationalist who is fighting both to retain his power and to destroy the Orient before they, as he believes, turn against the Occident.

Augustine has died while delivering a parcel containing a statue of a Buddha for an employee of Senator Sucamari of the Japanese Legation, and who, in his own way, is as fanatical as Rayburn himself. Sucamari wants to gain living room for the teeming millions of the Orient, but he dare not run the risk of reprisals from the World Police. Any aggressor would be eliminated by the atomic weapons stored at the Polar Bases. Working without official sanction, the Senator, together with his aide, Nagati, think they have found the answer. But the statue, which is their weapon, has vanished, stolen by a petty criminal from Augustine just prior to his death. Because of what it contains Sucamari dare not even make an official complaint.

Carmen Augustine, the messenger's daughter, is in love with Sam and he with her, but through his fear of bringing children into a world in which they can have no hope and no future, he attempts to deny his emotions. Children, now, are an economic necessity and childless marriages are a thing of the past. While helping her to check a flash advertising broadcast he spots Joe Leghorn, the petty criminal who has stolen the parcel.

The local police, overrun with work, cannot spare men to hunt down Leghorn, who, as far as they

are concerned, is in the clear. Instead, they suggest that Sam contact Father Rosen, a priest who runs a mission in the poorer section of the town. From him, Sam learns where to find Leghorn.

He finds him—too late. And he finds something else. Blues, because of their slightly altered metabolism, cannot die from normal disease or illness. They can die from accident, injury or starvation, but that is all. Sam finds three Blues. They are uninjured and in apparently good physical condition.

They, like Leghorn, are dead.

XIII

THE CONFERENCE PROMISED TO be interesting. Gerald had attended such meetings before, but usually they were a wearisome rehash of the obvious with a constant emphasis on the duties of the younger generation towards their elders. This time promised to be different.

Cyril, at the head of the table, rapped for silence, and, in his best board-room manner, opened the proceedings.

"For the benefit of late arrivals," he glanced at Arnold Franks, a man of about Gerald's age, who had only arrived an hour ago, "I would like to introduce Prosper,

of whom you have probably heard. Prosper, you have the floor."

"Thank you, Mr. Waterman." Prosper rose to his feet, rested his hands on the table, cleared his throat and began speaking in a dry, almost ironical voice. Listening to him, Gerald was reminded of a university professor who regarded his students as an unfortunate necessity. He realised why as Prosper warmed to his subject.

"As you all know, or should know if modern methods of news-dissemination are effective, I am interested in space flight. As yet I have received very little support from the public at large, and none at all from the World Council. I am no longer a young man, gentlemen, and so am forced to make a compromise. Mr. Waterman has shown interest in my project and has asked me to tell you something about it."

"Keep to the point, Prosper," said Cyril dryly. "You are not trying to sell us something."

"I am offering you something which you could not buy," said Prosper quietly. "I am offering you a new world."

"The Aphrodite Project?" Gerald bit his lips at his grandfather's expression. Damn the old man, anyway; wasn't it bad enough that he had ruled his life

from the cradle? Gerald scowled and made doodles on his scratch pad. Money was nice, and security was nice, but sometimes he felt that those things could be bought at too high a price.

"The Aphrodite Project," agreed Prosper evenly. He straightened from the table. "Men have been bound to one planet for too long," he said. "It is time they left the world of their birth and ventured out into the seas of emptiness around us, seas which are filled with islands each of which would double our living space and offer mankind a new home. A hundred and five years ago that dream trembled on the edge of reality with the launching of the artificial satellites. Eighty-five years ago Shizzy Murphy tried to reach the Moon and failed. With his failure the dream died. Today, the prospect of reaching worlds other than our own is regarded as a joke."

"Spare us your advertising." Cyril was frankly bored. "We are business men and interested only in facts. Please keep to the point."

"I had not left it." Prosper's dry voice held a snap. "Would you rather I went?"

"Don't talk like a fool, man." Prosper had more spirit than Cyril had given him credit for. But he didn't alter his tone. The

Mariguana group had the money, Prosper did not, and those with the money always held the power. "You need us more than we need you," he reminded. "Please continue."

"Very well." Prosper stared down at the table and fought his rising inclination to walk out. What the chairman had said was true. He did need them and, if his dream was ever to become more than a dream, he would have to yield to them. But it was hard, and if he had been twenty years younger . . .

"Shizzy Murphy was impatient," he said quietly. "He couldn't wait for the research then in progress to be perfected. He tried the old method of rocket propulsion, riding upwards mounted above a mass of high explosive and taking a madman's gamble with death. He lost and his tomb circles the Earth. But in losing he did more than just die—he killed the dream which men had nurtured for more than fifty years."

"The risk was too great," said Gerald. He made a point of not looking at the head of the table. "With immortality at stake men weren't interested in taking such risks."

"Exactly." Prosper smiled towards his supporter. "But a hundred years ago men were investigating the possibilities of nullifying gravity rather than in fighting it with rocket power. In the Americas alone there were four research projects working on the problem. Longevity came, and then the depression. Money was short and the projects were abandoned. But, though abandoned by the government, it was not forgotten by the workers. A small group, headed by my father, carried on their private investigations. My father died, killed in a laboratory explosion, but I carried on with the remainder of his fortune and what help I could obtain." He paused and glanced around the table. "I was successful."

"You are telling us that you have perfected a means of nullifying gravity, is that it?" Quentin Preston, his forward-thrusting jaw and heavy jowls giving him the appearance of a pugnacious bulldog, snapped the question.

"I am."

"Then why haven't you sold it to a transportation company?"

"I am not interested in planetary transportation," said Prosper mildly. Quentin snorted.

"Then you should be. Sell the invention, and with the money

gained build your ship. Simple business logic."

"Perhaps, but it isn't quite as simple as you seem to assume. Establishing the null-G field requires an immense amount of power. The ship, when completed, will need atomic generators to supply that power. Such generators are not cheap and they require heavy shielding. The drive would not be suitable for a stratoliner or ground vehicle. A submarine or an ocean liner, perhaps, but sea transport does not need a null-G field."

"So it's expensive." Quentin seized on the important factor. "How expensive?"

"I will need about twenty million dollars to complete the ship."

"Too expensive! Why, with that . . ." Quentin broke off as Cyril rapped on the table.

"We will reserve discussion until later," ordered the chairman. "All we require from Prosper now are the facts." He looked at the old man. "Your ship is popularly known as the Aphrodite Project. Aphrodite is another name for Venus. Is that the destination of your ship?"

"Yes."

"Why? Why Venus, that is? Why not Mars?"

"It would be very difficult to

live on Mars," said Prosper. "The air is thin, the planet arid, and any colony would have a tremendous struggle for survival. Venus is different. It is a warmer world and one with easily obtained minerals. Conditions there would be hard, yes, but not insurmountable. With the proper equipment it would be possible for large numbers of people to adapt the environment to suit human life. The air . . ."

"How do you know?"

"I beg your pardon?"

"How do you know," repeated Cyril. "No one knows for certain just what lies beneath the cloud layer of Venus. How are you so sure of surface conditions?"

Prosper drew a deep breath. It was time for him to tell all of the truth.

"I know because a ship has already reached Venus and returned," he said quietly. "Not a manned ship, but a robot one. It was sent thirty years ago, when the null-G drive was nearing perfection. The weight of the drive, at that time, was such as to preclude sending more than instruments and telemetering gear. The ship orbited, dived beneath the cloud layer, took samples of air and vapour and recorded various data. The ship crashed on landing but most of the data was salvaged." He hesitated. "The

cost of the probe ship was the thing which has forced me to beg for funds."

"I see." Cyril toyed with his stylo. "Thank you, Prosper, that will be all for now. If you will wait in the lounge?" He waited until the old man had left. "Well, gentlemen, you heard what Prosper had to say. Any comment?"

They all had something to say, Quentin Preston, Jud Franks, Henry Crowder, all the heads, sub-heads and new-Blues of the Mariguana clan group. Only Arnold and Gerald remained silent; Arnold probably out of respect for his elders, Gerald because he had learned from experience that nothing he could have to say would make the slightest difference.

He sat back, intent on his doodling, glancing at the other junior with idle curiosity. Had his wife already been selected for him? Was he married and doing his duty to his clan? Gerald glanced at Quentin, then hurriedly looked away. That bulldog expression! He straightened as Cyril called the meeting to order.

"Let me make it quite clear that we are going to back Prosper and his project," he said calmly. "If we don't, then the Ford clan

will." The threat won their attention as he knew it would.

"But twenty million!" said Quentin weakly. "It's fantastic."

"For what Prosper offers?" Cyril shook his head. "I think not. Let us look at the proposition as a long-term investment. By backing Prosper we gain control of his invention and so will have a virtual monopoly of space flight. With that monopoly we can dictate what passengers and goods we carry to our new world. And it will be our world, gentlemen, never forget that. We shall have sovereign rights and can make our own laws." He drew a deep breath.

"Need I elaborate?"

Cyril was clever; he didn't state the obvious, but every man in the room knew exactly what he was driving at. On a new world the old laws wouldn't apply. There would be no need for any Blue to suffer legal death. He was offering them a private empire with every advantage a power-hungry man could wish for.

Gerald, sitting back, could see the expressions of the men around him. Their forced retirement to the Mariguana Restezee Home was anathema to them; they wanted the feel of actual authority, the fire and clash of business, the power to tell others what they must do. For a moment he toyed

with the idea of cutting free, of liquidating the assets in his name and starting over afresh in some new locality. He could do it, he knew; the law did not recognise the property rights of any Blue. He could defy them all and laugh in their faces, for all they had over him was the power of tradition and so-called duty. But since when has any tyrant or dictator had more?

Gerald knew that he would do exactly as he was told to do. And now he learned the real reason for his presence at the conference.

"Rayburn has some power in the Council and he may be persuaded to use that power on our behalf. It shouldn't be hard to use him to obtain a government grant to help us found the new company." Cyril had it all worked out. "That is your job, Gerald. You will persuade Rayburn to iron out all difficulties. You may promise that he will be given a position of authority in the new regime. That should win him over if his record is anything to go by. Further details will be sent to you, but you can start winning Rayburn over to our side without delay. You know what to do."

Trust the clans to look after themselves, thought Gerald. Always have some of the heirs

close to those in authority so that they can use their influence when necessary. Revolt stirred within him, to die as soon as it was born. The elders knew best, trust the elders. He had been conditioned to that all his life.

There was more small talk and then, to Gerald's surprise, he was dismissed.

"Best for you to get straight back," ordered Cyril. "We want to get this thing moving without delay. Arnold will attend to the financial details while you work on Rayburn." Cyril rose to signify that he could leave.

"I'd hoped to stay over until tomorrow," protested Gerald. "It's getting late, and I won't be able to reach New York until well after dark. Besides, I'd like to visit my mother."

"Plenty of time for that, son." George, swollen with self-importance, his head full of the grand prospect of being part-owner of an entire planet, ushered him towards the door. "You do as Cyril says. Plenty of time for visiting when the job's done." He chuckled. "There's a great day coming, boy. A great day."

Gerald yielded, knowing argument was useless. He glanced at Prosper sitting in the lounge and wondered what the old man was

thinking. Probably burning inside at the treatment he had received. He smiled as Prosper looked at him.

"I'm leaving now for New York," said Gerald. "Can I give you a lift to Jacksonville?"

"No, thank you. There are still certain details to clarify, and then I am leaving direct for New Mexico. A plane has been chartered." Prosper returned the smile. "Thanks all the same."

Aloft in the jetcopter, the controls set on automatic, Gerald stared sourly down at the island. The old men had been smart, he had to admit that. When the legislation had been passed making all Blues legally dead, Cyril and the others had got together and formed a clan group. They had bought the island and built the homes. A limited liability company held all their wealth, the heirs of the clans being hereditary stockholders. Most of the income from the company, together with twenty per cent. of the earnings of the heirs, went to ensure the comfort of the elders.

They couldn't be blamed. It was natural for a man to want comfort and security; but at times Gerald wished that Blue had never discovered his serum.

The tyranny of the undying was, at times, irksome.

At Jacksonville he handed the jetcopter back to the charter firm and booked passage on the north-bound express. He was tired with long travelling, and George had kept him up half the previous night with business and family gossip. He took advantage of the five-hour wait for the express to catch up on his sleep. He booked in at a transient hotel, made sure that the clerk put a fresh plate in the Perbox, registered his thumb-print, transferred his valuables to the safety of the steel vault and went to bed.

He didn't sleep well. Two hours before his plane was due he woke to the sound of shouting in the streets and the noise of heavy trucks rumbling down to the shore. He tried to get back to sleep, failed, rose, showered, dressed, reclaimed his property and went down into the lounge, where he learned the reason for all the noise. One of the undersea farm domes had collapsed killing a hundred men and stranding a hundred and fifty others who had been working outside. They were now trying to make their way to the shore in their suits. The noise was from the rescue parties racing against time and distance in an effort to reach the men before their

air gave out. The clerk who relayed the information wasn't optimistic.

"They're twenty miles out on a forty-fathom bottom," he said. "It's rough country out there. If we can save ten per cent. of them it'll be a miracle."

"Tough," said Gerald. He was thinking of the labour contracts which would be voided by the actual death of the workers.

"Tough," agreed the clerk. They weren't thinking of the same thing.

The express had a full complement of passengers, most of whom were bound for New York. Gerald found himself sitting next to a plump matron who reeked of lavender and who insisted on telling him all about her Guru; an Indian who was teaching her all about the mysteries of the East at a hundred dollars a lesson.

"He's a simply marvellous man," she said for the dozenth time. "Such big, soulful eyes, and *so* unworldly. Why, you'd never believe it, but I actually had to *force* him to take the money. He just didn't want it; said that everything is Karma—that's illusion, you know, and that money is the biggest illusion of all. And he's *so* understanding. And he's so nice,

and very wise, and he's over a hundred years old, and, as I told the girls at the club, that just goes to show because he must have learned a lot having lived so long, and . . ."

Gerald nodded and smiled as if interested, and privately thought that at least one Blue had hit upon a lucrative racket. Though even at a hundred dollars a session it must have been hard work. He should have charged double and so gained at least four times the reputation. His customers, to judge by the matron, obviously belonged to the class who believe that the more expensive a thing is, the better it must be.

At Teterboro there was trouble. A uniformed policeman, local, not World, stood by the barrier checking the new arrivals. The public address system kept repeating over and over that all passengers bound for New York City should report to the administration building. Gerald showed his credentials to the officer and asked the natural question. The policeman was too busy and too tired to argue.

"Ask at the desk, mister, they'll tell you there. Next! Chicago? Over to section eight, follow the red line. Next!"

Gerald left him to it and walked to the administration building.

All other exits from the airport were closed, guarded by more uniformed police. Jetcopters drifted in the sky, their lights flashing the ground-or-else signal. Gerald frowned towards them, reminded, in some way, of the fuss and confusion he had left behind at Jacksonville.

At the administration a harassed clerk told him the reason for the guarded airport and the guarded sky.

New York was in quarantine.

XIV

IN A ROOM ON THE EIGHTY-seventh floor of the General Mercy Hospital, Sam Falkirk sat and waited to discover if he was going to live or die. It was a pleasant enough room, with a bed, table and chair, telly screen, books and magazines, and all the luxury of a high-priced private ward. It was small consolation to know that, if he did die, none of this need be destroyed with him. The cover-skin he was wearing would take care of that. The only things which could pass the paper-thin plastic were sound vibrations, air and light. Sound was transmitted by a stiffened portion which served as a diaphragm, and the plastic was transparent. A valve

admitted external air and another fed the respiration through an oxygen trap. If Sam were to die the cover-skin would be used as his coffin.

If he were to die. For the hundredth time he reviewed exactly what had happened when he had found the dead Blues. He had kicked open the door, walked across the floor and had jumped the counter. He had touched the door, the counter and the overhead light. And that was all. But he had breathed the air in the place and had almost touched the body of Joe Leghorn.

Sam was hoping that that "almost" would save his life.

He had called the Health Army immediately, shouting down the street until someone had answered, giving his instructions and then standing guard until the mobile squad had arrived. They had been very efficient as, dressed in their cover-skins, they had collected the dead and sealed the premises. Towards Sam they had been gentle but firm. He had been exposed to the disease. He was suspect. He must be isolated and cleared. Now he waited for the verdict.

He picked up a magazine, glanced at the inflated torso of a telly actress advertising a new brand of soap, put it down and

selected another. This time the same actress assured the world that she owed her charm and figure, not to the plastic cosmeticians, which would have been anyone's guess, but to a certain laxative. A third magazine gave the information that laxatives only created internal disorders and that Wondercrack, the bulk food which contains no protein, carbohydrates or vitamins, nothing but good, old fashioned roughage, was the one thing to give good health. It also, according to the pictures, provided a royal road to rapid promotion, wealth and, naturally, the automatic happiness which wealth would bring. Sam had a vivid mental picture of millions of low-income employees religiously eating the stuff and waiting hopefully for the rapid promotion. It had to be rapid. If they ate nothing else they would starve to death before it came. He put down the magazine as Jelks entered the room.

"Relax," said the doctor. He looked tired and his eyes were red from overstrain. "You can take that thing off now and have a shower. You're clear."

"I am?" Sam felt a tremendous relief. Now, for the first time, he knew how a condemned criminal felt when reprieved at the last

minute. His legs suddenly grew weak and he sat on the edge of the bed. Jelks glared at the unrumpled cot.

"Didn't you get any sleep?" He answered his own question. "Of course you didn't; how the hell could you relax?" He slapped Sam on the shoulder. "Get that thing off and have a shower. I'll have coffee here by the time you've cleaned up." He remembered something. "Here's your uniform. It's been cleaned and irradiated. Hurry now."

True to his promise, hot coffee stood on the table when Sam returned from the shower. He poured two cups, added plenty of sugar and passed one to Sam. A package of cigarettes lay beside the tray and he shook a couple free, waited until Sam had inhaled and then lit his own.

"This is a bad situation, Sam," he said. "Have you spoken to Lanridge yet?"

"How could I?" Sam drew at his cigarette with the satisfaction of a smoker who has been denied tobacco when he needed it most. "The colonel must be as busy as hell and, anyway, I've been cooped up in here since I sent in the warning." He stretched with animal pleasure. "It's good

to know that I'm not under the chopper."

"I can guess." Jelks looked at the tip of his cigarette. "Lanridge told me that they found twenty dead in that shop, eighteen Blues and two others, one of them the owner. It was lucky you found them when you did."

"How long before we can start tracing the progress of the disease?"

"We've already started," said Jelks grimly. "Johanasen, the owner of that junk shop, ran a soup kitchen and used the rest of the premises as a flop house. The Blues we found dead in his shop worked for him. He must have contaminated everyone around him during the past twenty-four hours of his life."

"That's the effective period, isn't it?" Sam looked thoughtful. "I've been in quarantine for that long, so all those Johanasen contaminated must be dead by now."

"And all those whom they contacted will be dead in the next twenty-four hours and so on." Jelks didn't look happy. "How many people do you think a carrier could contaminate in that time, Sam?"

"Plenty." It didn't require a genius to know that. "Is the twenty-four-hour period definite?"

"Yes. If a man doesn't die within that time then there was nothing wrong with him in the first place. We've found out a few things since I spoke to you last. About the bacteria, I mean. The death of the Blues threw new light on it. You know that the longevity serum effectively protects the body against all normal bacterial and virus diseases?"

Sam nodded. "I don't know why though."

"Neither does anyone for certain. My guess is that the serum alters the metabolism a trifle, not enough so that ordinary food can't be assimilated, but enough to make the body so alien to invading germs that they don't stand a chance." Jelks gestured with his cigarette. "Excuse the terminology. I'm too tired to think of the fancy words."

"I wouldn't understand them if you could," said Sam. "One day I'll have saved enough money to afford a hypno-course in preliminary medicine, but that day isn't yet."

"Save your money," advised Jelks dryly. "It takes ten years of actual hospital work as well as the hypno-courses before you can qualify. Even then you're only allowed to empty the bed pans.

Patients don't like amateurs working on them when a mistake can cost them immortality."

"That's understandable." Sam drank the last of his coffee. "But I didn't mean that I wanted to become a doctor. Not that it's a bad idea at that; plenty of security in the future."

"Security means a lot to you, doesn't it, Sam?"

"Your coffee's getting cold, why don't you drink it?"

"So you don't want to talk about it." Jelks shrugged and gulped his coffee. "I could say a lot about the psychological aspect of that, but I won't. Why should I treat you for free, anyway?" He smiled then became serious. "You're getting on, Sam. When are you going to marry and start raising some kids?"

"Plenty of time for that yet." Sam changed the subject. "Lan-ridge put on a local quarantine, of course?"

"At first he did, but it wasn't any use. Now it's total."

"Total! The whole city?"

"Didn't you know?" Jenks glanced towards the telly screen. "Hell, Sam, what have you been doing with yourself all this time?"

"Thinking." Sam didn't go into details. The thoughts of a man who believes that he may

die are something more than private.

"We had a case outside the quarantined area," said Jelks. "Lanridge immediately sealed the city and warned everyone to go home and stay there. Then, when that didn't work, he sent out a freeze-or-else." He shrugged. "That worked. Or it did after people began to believe that he meant what he said."

"They would." Sam was grim. "Damn it! To think a few microbes could cause this trouble!"

"A few microbes," repeated Jelks. He lit a fresh cigarette, apparently forgetting the one he had smouldering in the ash tray. "They were no accident, Sam."

"What's that?"

"I said that this disease is no accident." Jelks met Sam's level stare. "Those bugs were made to order."

"Are you sure?" Sam wasn't surprised, not as much as he should have been. He'd had a sneaking suspicion that something was wrong ever since Augustine died. But feelings weren't important against concrete evidence. "Proof?"

"Only the bacteria itself. It's too close to the perfect germ weapon to be accidental. Look at

it. Anærobic for easier control. It kills with a hundred per cent. efficiency. You can't do anything when your blood starts to solidify, except pray. It has a short incubation period and its speed of propagation is fantastic. It is selective in that it is harmless to animal life, and it kills Blues and non-Blues both."

"And that makes it a weapon?"

"What else? There isn't a natural disease known which has a hundred per cent. killing efficiency. Not even the mutated viruses developed during the cold war had that. They were bad, yes, but everyone had a greater or lesser resistance to them. They were normal diseases in that they entered the body and started a war to the finish. If the virus won, the man died. If the man won, he lived. With this thing, no one stands a chance because there is no fighting. The bacteria simply enters into a relationship with the thrombin and increases its effect by an incredible amount. The clotting of the blood is merely a by-product of that relationship, but it is a by-product which kills."

"A weapon presupposes an enemy," said Sam slowly. "If you are right and this thing was hand-made for use as a weapon, then they, whoever the enemy

are, wouldn't have released it without having some form of protection. Can you figure out some way of gaining immunity?"

"First we've got to find out all about what we're trying to immunise against," said Jelks. "At the moment we're concentrating on finding out what this stuff does. When we know that, and a lot more, we can begin to find something to combat it. But that will take time, Sam, lots of time. And there needn't be an anti-toxin at all."

"Would the enemy, if there is an enemy, have released it without?"

"It depends on who they are," said Jelks slowly. "It's early to tell yet, but I've the idea that this thing is pretty short-lived as compared to some diseases we used to have. It can thrive while in the human body or similar medium, but deprived of that medium it will die. Like syphilis, if there aren't any men there can't be any syphilis. We got rid of that pest by treating everybody, and I mean everybody, with a double-effective dose of neopen. The same result would have been achieved if everyone had died."

"I follow," said Sam. "The Americas are surrounded by oceans. With a twenty-four-hour death period from time of in-

fection it would be simple for the enemy to ensure a quarantine period for all travellers from this area. Not that the World Police or Health Army would permit such travel in the first place. So they wait until the thing burns itself out for lack of more hosts. They wait until the dead have decomposed and the danger is past. Then they move in. If there is a 'they,' that is."

"You doubt it?" Jelks looked distastefully at his cigarette, then threw it into a disposal unit. "You still think that this is an accident?"

"I don't know." Sam was thoughtful. "If this thing is what you claim, then they've released it pretty clumsily. So far, it's just local. If it were a weapon, surely it would be all over the Americas by now?"

"How much proof do you need?" Jelks was irritable with fatigue. "I tell you that the bug isn't natural. If it was we wouldn't be here now to argue about it. Men can't live with solid blood in their veins."

"Take it easy," soothed Sam. "When did you sleep last?"

"I don't remember. Not since Augustine died, I think." Jelks snapped his fingers. "I forgot. Your girl friend wants you to phone her. She's stuck at your

office and seemed worried about you. I promised that you'd phone as soon as possible." He gestured towards the videophone. "Go ahead. You've got crash priority."

Mike answered the phone, his worried face staring from the screen. "Sam! Are you all right?"

"Perfect."

"Are you sure? No . . . ?"

"No bugs, no nothing. No need for you to pass the hat." Sam smiled at his secretary. "How are things?"

"It's hell," said Mike simply. "Glad you're all right, sir."

"Not as glad as I am," said Sam dryly. "Is Carmen there?"

"Yes." Mike's face vanished, to be replaced by Carmen's anxious expression.

"Sam, I'm so glad. It was terrible thinking that I might never see you again. Are you sure that there's no danger?"

"I'm sure." Sam became suddenly aware of Jelks at his side. "How is it you're at the office?"

"I was in the building when the freeze-or-else order came through, and now I can't move. Mike tells me that if I try to get home I'll be shot down in the street. Is that true?"

"It's true, right enough." Sam was serious. "Don't try it, Carmen.

The Health Army mean what they say. Everyone has to stay in the building they are in until given permission to leave. Any unauthorised persons on the streets will be shot without question." He smiled at her to minimise the situation. "Anyway, what have you to worry about? You're in the best place there is at a time like this."

"I'd be more comfortable if you were here." Her smile was frank invitation. "Coming home, Sam?"

"Home?"

"Home is where your heart is, or didn't you know that?"

"Home is where I hang my hat." Sam cut the connection and stared at Jelks. "When can I get out of here? With the city in stasis I'm needed at the office."

"I've arranged transportation," said Jelks. "You'll have to wait until the Health Army gives you clearance and an escort. If you try it alone you'll be shot down just the same as anyone else. Those boys don't play, Sam, they can't afford to."

"I know." Sam stared absently through the window. Below and before him the city, blazing with advertisements, sprawled like some jagged-backed monster, the soaring towers of the new build-

ings dwarfing the squat bulks of the old. Normally the streets would have been filled with traffic, the sidewalks crowded with pedestrians. Now a strange emptiness had replaced the restless tide of movement, and even the sky was devoid of traffic. Only the drifting jetcopters of the air guards made moving touches of colour against the night sky. Sam shivered a little, despite the warmth of the air-conditioned room, and turned from the window to meet Jelks' stare.

"What made you do that, Sam?"

"Do what? Stare out of the window? Shiver?"

"What made you insult that girl? She's in love with you, don't you know that?"

"So she's in love with me." Sam helped himself to another cigarette. "Must I marry her and raise a parcel of kids just because of that?"

"No," admitted the doctor. "But it helps to have a wife who's in love with you—especially when you're in love with your wife." He rose and stood by the captain. "What's wrong, Sam? Why can't you and Carmen make a go of it?"

"Isn't this rather an odd time to be talking about love and marriage." Sam gestured towards

the window. "Personally, I think that's more important."

"Maybe you're right." Jelks pressed his fingers against his eyes, blinking as he relieved the pressure. "But I'd like to know why it is you're afraid of marriage."

Sam could have told him, but he knew he wouldn't. Marriage didn't scare him—children did. It wasn't that he didn't like children; he was a normal, healthy man, but he wasn't happy about the world they would be born into. The world was overcrowded as it was, and getting worse all the time. If he married Carmen he would be morally bound to support her dependants. That wasn't so bad, and if that were all he wouldn't hesitate. But the children of the marriage would also be saddled with the burden, a dead weight on their lives which would grow worse, not better.

He remembered the students at the school, young, eager, hopeful as all young people should be. None of them realised what they had to face; a lifetime of work chained to the concept of family duty. The alternative was a lifetime of loneliness, of guilt at having deserted their dependants, of fear of what the future would bring. The immortality which men had craved since the dawn of time would be a curse, not a

blessing. Unsupported Blues lived in a financial hell without end and without hope.

It was a heritage which Sam refused to pass on.

XV

CARMEN WAS ASLEEP WHEN SAM arrived at his office. She sat at his desk, her head resting on her arms and she looked very young and very lovely. Sam looked down at her, feeling a sudden tenderness for the girl. He glanced at Mike.

"How long?"

"Since just after you phoned." Mike yawned and lit a cigarette. He was unshaven, his uniform rumpled and his eyes red from fatigue. A phial of wakey pills stood beside a cup containing the dregs of coffee. His desk was littered with report sheets. "She was almost out on her feet, and I didn't have the heart to wake her up."

"She can't stay here." Sam gently moved a coil of black hair from where it had fallen across her face. "Has anyone fixed up any sleeping accommodation?"

"For the staff, yes, not for the general public." Mike rose to his feet. "I doubt if the staff will be using their beds. Would you like

me to take her down to the rest room?"

"Please. Any arguments, refer them to me."

"They won't argue." Mike stepped forward and picked up the sleeping girl. She stirred a little, mumbled something and threw her arms around the officer's neck, snuggling her head against his shoulder. Mike looked embarrassed, seemed about to say something and then walked quickly from the office. When he returned he was apologetic.

"She must have thought it was you," he said. "We'd been talking about you and she was asleep, and everything."

"Forget it." Sam had other things to worry about than Mike's idea of what constituted proper conduct. "Give me the picture."

"Lanridge took command of all police and health troops when he issued the freeze-or-else order. External units of the Health Army have already surrounded the city with troops and mobile weapons. The local police are guarding the barricades, stations, airports and working with the coast guard to seal the harbour. Our men are concentrating on patrolling the air over the city while the Health Army patrol the streets." Mike ran his fingers through his hair. "We've got

everything more or less under control now."

"Good. Any urgent messages?"

"Some of the senators have been ringing through. I've managed to persuade them all that they can help most by staying where they are." Mike yawned again, and picking up the phial of tablets shook a couple into his palm. He put them into his mouth, swallowed, made a face and ran to the water container for a drink. "Never could swallow tablets dry," he explained. He snapped his fingers. "I almost forgot. Colonel Lanridge wants to see you. He asked you to report to him as soon as you arrived."

From the office Sam took the elevator to the lower levels, stepping carefully over the sprawled figures of sleeping men and women who had been trapped in the building. Below ground level the corridors were clear. Sam left the elevator and walked along the twisting, anti-radiation passage to the operations room of the Health Army.

Colonel Lanridge did not look like the popular conception of a professional soldier. He was small, slightly stooped, almost bald and with eyes which glistened from the contact lenses he wore. His uniform never fitted, and now it

looked as if it had been slept in. It hadn't, Sam knew; the colonel wouldn't have slept since the emergency began. Lanridge was standing at the edge of the map section staring thoughtfully at clusters of coloured lights.

"Hello, Sam, pleased to see you." He spoke as if he begrudged the time needed for pleasantries. "Jelks told me that you were clear. Nasty experience."

"I could have done without it." Sam examined the map. "How are we doing?"

"Not so good." Lanridge picked up a pointer and rested it on the map. "The red lights show where there has been an outbreak of the disease. This one is where you reported the outbreak, the others have come in since then."

"So many?"

"Too many." Lanridge sounded grim. "My guess is that it was spread by the people who ate at Johansen's soup kitchen." The pointer moved to a different point on the map. "The yellow lights are suspect areas. Persons within them could have been in contact with carriers. The green lights show places which, at the moment, we know to be clean. Small families who can account for every member, and who haven't been out, places like that. There aren't many of them."

"Not enough," agreed Sam. "What is your decision concerning the danger areas?"

"We have issued cover-skins to everyone within the locality, together with instructions to strip and don them. At the end of the critical period, I've set it at thirty hours to be on the safe side, the living will be removed, the cover-skins sterilized, and the dead taken care of."

"How?"

"Napalm," said Lanridge shortly. "We've chosen selected sites for lazar houses, and later we'll burn them and the dead to ash." He shrugged at Sam's expression. "There's no other way. Those places are verminous, and we don't know enough about this disease to take any chances. For all we know, mice and bugs could act as hosts while remaining unaffected themselves."

"Did Jelks tell you what he had discovered about the bacteria?"

"Yes." Lanridge looked at the officer. "What's on your mind, Sam?"

"I was just thinking. From what he told me the normal methods of fighting disease are useless. We can't vaccinate or immunise because the body has no antibiotics against the bacteria, and can't produce any. In

that case, the only really effective counter-measure is isolation and sterilization."

"That's about it," said Lanridge evenly. "Sounds simple, doesn't it?" He gestured towards the map. "But in the city are twenty million people, most of whom are away from their homes. How long can you keep an entire city in house-quarantine? How can you control twenty million people when panic starts and they realise that they are living in a plague area?"

"I see what you mean," said Sam. "It isn't going to be pleasant."

"It's going to be nowhere near pleasant," said Lanridge grimly. "But it's got to be done. The city is sealed and no one will get in or out until this thing is finally settled. With luck, we can beat it in," he glanced at his watch, "another thirty-three hours. With co-operation, that is. If people break quarantine and start moving around we'll have to start all over again."

"Why so long? I thought twenty-four hours was the critical period?"

"I'm playing it safe," explained Lanridge. "The local quarantine broke down in twelve hours. It took time for the people to realise that the freeze-or-else order meant what it said. I want the city in

stasis until all danger of contamination has passed. If we can enforce the order, we can do it. If we can't, then New York can be written off as a total loss."

He didn't elaborate, and he didn't have to. Once the plague got out of control twenty million people would die. And if the quarantine order could not be maintained, then the disease would get out of control. Lanridge was obviously determined to see that his order was obeyed. He swore softly to himself as an unmarked patch on the map turned a vivid red.

"More trouble! That place should have been charted by the investigation teams." He brushed past Sam on his way to a phone and the captain heard him give swift orders to the officer in charge of that area. He returned shaking his head. "No co-operation," he complained. "The chances are that everyone we question is lying through fear, or desire to please, or just because we wear uniforms and give orders." He stared at Sam as if seeing him for the first time. "Well? How about getting down to work?"

"That's why I'm here." Sam wasn't annoyed at the colonel's abruptness. Lanridge had enough responsibility on his shoulders

without having to worry about trifles such as politeness. "What do you want me to do?"

"Take over from Lessacre; he's out on his feet. Check the investigation teams and handle any emergency."

Sam collected an orderly, relieved the officer and got down to work. "Check section eleven," he said to the girl. "Find out if teams have visited the address of Joe Leghorn." He repeated it twice to make sure she understood. "He died of the disease; probably caught it from Johansen. Check everyone living in his lodging house, and check his office, too, he may have gone there. Then try . . ."

Check this, check that, try everything and anything possible. Check the restaurant where he usually ate, the bars which he may have frequented, the public videophones he may have used just before someone else. And not only for one man, but for everyone who was reported dead. Check back so as to try and find all he may have infected, so that the health teams could be on the spot. Check everything humanly possible, and then there still would be uncovered loopholes. A sneeze could have infected a pedestrian. A cough the same. A Blue could have picked up a freshly discarded

cigarette end. Someone could have accepted money from a perspiring hand. How to stop the invisible killer?

The answer: wait. Wait until it revealed itself in patches of flaring red on the map. Then send out the teams to seal the area. Send out more teams to check the probable path of the disease so as to try and get one jump ahead, to guess where the danger spots were.

And keep the people off the streets. Keep them pinned down so that, if one of them had the disease, it would remain localised. But the Health Army was limited. First priority was the red areas which had to be ringed with guards, the inhabitants sealed in cover-skirts and then transported to a lazar house. Second priority was to the yellow areas in which the killer might strike at any time and cause mindless panic. Again, these areas had to be ringed with guards. The rest of the city was covered by patrols and ruled by fear.

Three hundred people had been shot down before the populace realised that the freeze-or-else order meant exactly what it said. Two hundred more died as they broke quarantine and made a race for home and supposed safety. Fifty more had been

killed for no other reason than that they thought it fun to run the patrol gauntlet. Now the people knew the guards meant business but, as the hours dragged past, tension began to mount.

It was no longer a joke. Men and women were hungry and tired, without cigarettes and faced with something they didn't have the mental equipment to handle. Hysteria began to blind them to the dangers outside.

"Sector nine," droned a wall-speaker. "Trouble at the corner of Peterboro and Vine. Breakout from a building by about two hundred people. Guards can't handle them."

"Order copters three and six to bomb the area with tear gas," ordered Sam. "Send the section's reserves to the area. No shooting unless unavoidable, but use machine guns if necessary."

"Sector nineteen." Even the wall-speaker sounded tired. "Car fifteen reports that missiles are being thrown from windows along Madison Avenue. Car thirteen wrecked and crew dead."

"Order copter eleven to drift along the avenue and fire warning shots at all open windows." Sam reached for a phone. "Operator, get me the radio station, local

services. Hurry!" He waited impatiently as the screen flashed with colour then revealed the image of a man. He was a young man wearing a lilac suit, and his smile was as artificial as the wave in his hair.

"Yes?"

"Captain Falkirk, World Police," Sam identified himself. "I want a message put out on all channels."

"Another message!" The young man looked pained. "But our schedule! You've already ruined it by your previous orders and . . ."

"Shut up and listen." Sam was in no mood to bandy words with this simpering fool. "This is a warning. All windows must be kept closed against copter-dropped gas. The gas is a fumigant with a high irritant quality and will tend to hover at the higher levels. Complete protection will be afforded against the effects of the gas if all windows are kept firmly closed. Now get that out immediately and repeat every five minutes for the next half hour."

"I'll handle it." The young man bit his nails. "Is it as bad as they say?"

"Is what bad?"

"You know, the plague. Is it true that the streets are filled with dead?"

"Why don't you go outside and take a look?" Sam wondered who had spread the rumour, and just how far from reality it now was.

"Go outside?" The young man shuddered. "Are you joking?"

"No. If you are worried, then go out into the streets and see for yourself." Sam shrugged. "Of course, you'll be shot if you do, but then you won't be worried any more, will you?" He cut the connection before the young man could answer, and discovered Lanridge standing beside him. The colonel held out a cup of coffee and a pack of cigarettes.

"Time you quit," he said. "Lessacre can take over from you now."

"He's asleep." Sam ripped open the package and lit a cigarette.

"He was asleep," corrected Lanridge. "You've been on duty longer than you think."

"Have I?" Sam glanced at his watch, held it to his ear and wound it. "How are we going now?"

"I think that we've got on top of it." Lanridge gestured towards the map. The poorer sections were splotched with angry red. "No new outbreaks for some time. We must wait another twelve hours at least before we can be sure."

"And then?"

"Then we quarantine the infected areas and release the general freeze."

"So soon?" Sam frowned. "Wouldn't it be better to wait until the agreed period?"

"It would, but we can't do it." Lanridge sounded very tired. "Twenty million people need a lot of feeding, Sam, and no food is coming into the city. But that isn't the real reason. We simply cannot enforce the general freeze much longer. Incidents are piling up; another three cars wrecked by missiles dropped from buildings, two outbreaks resulting in eighty dead and injured, a fire . . ." Lanridge swallowed. "I don't like to think about that."

"I see." Sam didn't ask for details; he didn't want to know. Lanridge fought disease as earlier soldiers had fought enemies of flesh and blood, and now, as then, casualties were to be expected. But Sam was glad that he hadn't had to make the decisions and accept the responsibility.

He rose and stepped towards the map, his eyes tracing familiar streets. A patch of red reminded him of Father Rosen. The mission, naturally; infected Blues from Johansen's must have passed on the disease. Lanridge came up beside him.

"That was a bad one," he said quietly. "We're using it as a dumping ground for the dead."

So they would all burn together, the priest, the Blues, the drifters and loafers, the respectable and the poor who had fallen victim to the plague and who were now, as never before, equal in the sight of God and man.

"Go and have some rest," ordered Lanridge. He became stern. "Get out of here. Go up to your office and bed down for a while. There's nothing else you can do here now."

Sam was too tired to argue. He had been awake for almost sixty hours and had been through a strain when waiting to discover whether or not he was going to live or die. The elevator took him back upstairs and Mike blinked at him with bloodshot eyes as he entered the office.

"How's it going?"

"We're winning." Sam slumped in his chair. "You got any of those pills left?"

"Sorry, used the last a few hours ago." Mike looked concerned. "I'll send down for coffee though, maybe that'll help."

"That and about a week's sleep." Sam relaxed, feeling tiredness numb his limbs. "Anything come up while I was downstairs?"



"Not much." Mike picked up a flimsy. "This came in last night but I didn't think it worth bothering you with. Senator Rayburn's in a lazar house."

Sam hadn't heard him; he was already asleep.

XVI

RAYBURN WASN'T WORRIED BY the general freeze. He had worries of his own. When a man took the longevity treatment there were three ways by which he could safeguard his future. He could buy residence in a Restezee Home where he would be taken care of to the extent of the interest on his money less certain charges. He could leave his money to his heirs and depend on their charity. He could convert all his holdings into cash, hide the money, and hope that none of the human wolves who took an interest in such things would track him down.

Worried or not, Rayburn didn't have much choice. He had no heirs, and so the usual solution was closed to him. For the first time he regretted his bachelor existence; a son, now, would have solved the problem. A young man ready and willing to be guided and advised by his father. An extension, in effect, of himself. But

now it was too late for that. He could adopt an heir, true, but Rayburn had lived too long to put any trust in the generosity of strangers. Hiding his money was also out. Even if he managed to dodge the thieves, it was a barren solution. The legally dead could not open a bank account, own shares or safeguard their money in any way. Compound interest was something which no bank was willing to grant an immortal. He was left with the only remaining solution.

Irritably he riffled the colourful brochures scattered before him on his desk. They were all the same: each lauded the merits of a particular Restezee Home. All offered to end all worries about the future for a lump sum in cash or liquid assets to the same value. The Mariguana Home offered the freedom of a tropical island for a mere ten million dollars. The Holmanburg Home presented the joys of the Rockies for half that sum. A third, obviously aimed at a low-income group, promised bed and board coupled with healthy exercise for a trifling one hundred thousand dollars.

Rayburn wasn't impressed. He'd seen some of the cheap Restezees. The beds were usually tiered bunks stacked in a barn,

and privacy was non-existent. The board and exercise went together; you ate what you grew in a truck garden, or you didn't eat. He dropped the brochure, leaned back in his chair and stared at the ceiling.

It was very quiet, quieter than he had ever known it before. The freeze order had caught him at home alone and Rayburn wasn't used to being alone. Always, all his life, he had been surrounded by other people. As a boy he had shared a bed with three other children, worn hand-me-downs, eaten in rotation and learned to do his thinking in private. Even after he had cut away from the dead weight of family ties he had never known real solitude. Now, for the first time in his life, he was really alone.

He started as a car hummed past in the street outside, its turbine whining in tune with its tyres as it rounded a corner. For a moment he had hoped that it was Gerald returning, but it was only a patrol car prowling the streets. Restlessly, he rose and paced the room. He felt deflated, his ambitions seeming to have vanished in a cloud of depression. Probably it was because of his morbid study of the brochures. He hadn't sent for them, but they had arrived just the same. He was

a public figure and his age was no secret. The promoting companies would have him on their files as a likely prospect.

Angrily he brushed them from his desk towards the waste-paper basket. They fluttered from the polished wood like a shower of coloured snowflakes, most of them falling on the carpet rather than in the basket. Rayburn glowered at them, half-inclined to leave them where they were; then, disturbed by the untidiness, stooped and picked them up. One pamphlet, different from the others, caught his eye and he straightened it with his hand.

It was from Prosper, and the cover showed a spaceship against a background of stars. It had been printed in luminous ink so that, as Rayburn held it beneath the desk light, it glowed with crawling colour. At any other time the senator would have thrown it aside, but now, from boredom, he began to read it. When he had finished he stared thoughtfully before him.

The pamphlet had been produced by experts, and both pictures and text had just the right balance of attention-catching appeal. For a man with nothing, it offered a new life; for a man with moderate wealth it offered

far more than that. Venus, as Prosper pointed out, was not subject to Earth law. Any intelligent reader could guess what that meant, and Rayburn was far from being unintelligent.

The attention signal from the videophone broke his reverie, the soft hum startlingly loud in the silence. He activated the screen. "Yes?"

"Senator Rayburn?"

"Can't you recognise me?"

"Sorry, sir." Mike's face on the screen betrayed his fatigue. "This is just a routine call. Are you all right?"

"Certainly."

"And your household? Of course, you are alone." Mike consulted something before him. "We have located your aide. He is at Teterboro airport and is detained there for the duration of the emergency. He will be released as soon as possible."

"And when will that be?" Rayburn did not make the mistake of trying to assert his authority to obtain quick release of his aide. He knew that, at the moment, he was only an individual in a city of individuals.

"That depends on Colonel Larridge, sir." Mike was pleasantly surprised that Rayburn had remained so calm.

"Naturally." Rayburn hesitated. "Any fresh news as to how this thing started?"

"No, sir."

"There will, of course, be a full investigation?"

"I expect so, sir." Mike was uncomfortable. He had a lot to do and didn't want to waste time. Yet to cut short the conversation would be rude. Rayburn solved the dilemma.

"Thank you, officer. Let me know if there are any new developments."

Rayburn cut the connection and stared thoughtfully at the blank screen. There would be an investigation, and he would see that he was in charge of it. The thing which had hit New York would horrify the nation, and if he could find the slightest scrap of proof tying it with the Orient he would turn the political situation upside down. But in the meantime . . .

He picked up Prosper's pamphlet and began to re-read it.

The freeze had caught Nagati in the house of Lang Ki, dealer in Oriental works of art. His presence was no accident. Sucamari's hint to the dealers that he was interested in a certain type of art had brought results. When the dealer had received the statue and box

from Johanasen he had sent word to the Japanese legation of his new possession.

In this he was being both businesslike and careful. Such an item would be well known to a collector of Sucamari's standing, and, if it were stolen, he would learn from where and whom. In such a case he would enter into negotiations with the insurance company, taking a legitimate, if small reward. If, on the other hand, it was clean, then the Japanese would be the one most likely to offer a high figure.

Lang Ki, if he was disappointed that Sucamari could not honour him with his presence, did not show it. He ushered Nagati into his study, sent for tea, and embarked on a long and tedious session of Oriental pleasantries. Lang Ki had never seen the Orient, but that did not prevent him from acting the part of a gracious Mandarin. It was his means of asserting his individuality, and he erected around himself a fragment of culture which had died beneath the impact of modern civilization.

His study reflected his fantasy. Chinese tapestries hung against the walls and the low table was of teak inlaid with mother of pearl. Royal dragons writhed across scattered pieces of silk and every-

thing was black lacquer and inlay. Nagati, though he had no patience with the dealer's make-believe, had no choice but to fit into the pattern. Not to have done so would have been to offend his host and, at all costs, he must obtain the thing Lang Ki had for sale.

So he smiled and bowed as the dealer expanded before his audience. He spoke of a piece of jade he had recently acquired, depreciating it as unworthy and insisting that his guest study it to see how poor a thing it was. They drank endless tea in tiny cups so fragile that it seemed a breath would shatter the delicate porcelain. They chewed melon seeds and conversed in the sing-song Cantonese which Nagati knew as well as his own language. Finally, Lang Ki got down to business.

The box was, he admitted, a pitiful thing and the statue it contained badly discoloured. Yet, perhaps, it may have some interest for the gracious Sucamari. He rose and lifted the lid of a chest, pausing as a girl entered the room with the news of the general house-quarantine. Philosophically, he shrugged, lifted the inlaid box from its resting place and set it on the low table.

"It seems that my poor house

is to be honoured with your presence for many tranquil hours," he said. "All who are found on the streets will be shot. The girl has just brought the information. If you wish to make a call the videophone is at your disposal."

"Thank you, but no." Nagati had his own reasons for refusing. In time of emergency it was likely that private calls would be banned and, though he could possibly get through to Sucamari, the chances were that his call would be monitored. In any case, there might be a record of who he was and where he was calling from. Caution, now as never before, was of prime necessity. There was nothing to do but wait.

While they waited Lang Ki showed the aide the box. Carelessly he scratched the soft coating on the Buddha, using the same fingers to stuff more melon seeds into his mouth. Nagati dared not caution him, but it didn't matter. The dealer was as good as dead. Not just because he was handling the statue, but because disease was already loose in the city, and that disease had originated from what he held in his hands. Someone had become contaminated. That someone had passed the box to a messenger and so passed on the disease. That messenger, in

turn, had delivered it to Lang Ki, together with the box.

Nagati knew that he was in a house of the dying and that, he himself, was also a dying man.

He accepted the fact with the fatalism of the East, and immediately dismissed it for things of greater importance. If he should be found here with the box his death would implicate Sucamari and, through him, the Orient. The dreaded threat of retaliation would then be no longer merely a threat. He had to get away and take the box with him, and if possible deliver it to Sucamari. He, even now, could still carry out the plan if he possessed it and was free of suspicion.

Patiently he sat and toyed with the chessmen which Lang Ki had set on the table. He could afford to wait until almost dawn and then, whether Lang Ki was alive or not, he would have to make a break for it. If the dealer was still alive then Nagati would kill him. The murder was unnecessary. Two hours before dawn the dealer hissed with pain, clutched at his chest and fell across the chessboard. Nagati wrapped up the parcel and headed for the door.

Outside, the streets shone with colour, the rain-wet concrete re-

flecting the gaudy advertisements. A patrol car hummed past, the light glinting from the barrels of rifles and light machine guns. Nagati shrank back into the doorway, waited until the street was clear, then darted forward along the sidewalk.

Luck favoured him, that and a shrewd and calculating mind. He ran at top speed down the streets then, as instinct and hearing warned him, dived into the shelter of doorways or side streets, standing motionless with his face to the wall and his hands hidden as the cars hummed past.

The tired men sitting in the cars were watching for movement, not oddly shaped shadows or patches of deeper darkness. Their eyes were burning with continual watching, their nerves tense with strain. They would have shot at anything which moved, but Nagati did not move. Unless he were trapped in a patch of light or ran when he should have halted, he stood a chance of reaching safety.

Circumstance dictated his route. He chose the darker streets and stayed away from the glittering shop fronts and so, inevitably, wended towards the poorer section of town. Here the cars were more frequent, their tyres whining as they raced around corners,

their headlights and spotlights bathing the streets with brilliance.

Nagati froze as a car passed him, feeling his flesh cringe to an expected bullet. He turned and ran desperately towards an intersection, then skidded to a halt as sound and light signalled another car. He crossed the street, dived into an alley between two buildings and heard a shout as someone caught the hint of movement. Terror gave him strength and he ran faster, jumping over a glass-topped wall, not feeling the pain of his gashed hands. Before him a short passage gave onto an empty street and he raced towards it as turbines whined behind him and torchlight illuminated the wall over which he had jumped.

He reached the street and found that he had run into a trap. The block he was in formed the centre of a square, the alley being the only break in the row of houses. Within seconds cars would come from either end and the path behind him would be blocked. In a short while the guards would see him and their shots would follow at once.

There was only one thing left for him to do.

Rayburn started as he heard the frenzied pounding on the door. He was still awake, still fully

dressed, despite the late hour. He had tried to sleep but the loneliness disturbed him. He had risen, dressed, and now sat in the study glancing again at Prosper's pamphlet and toying with fantasies of himself as leader of a new world.

He rose as the pounding redoubled in violence and urgency. Above the noise he could hear the scream of tyres as they tore at concrete then the sharp, unmistakable sound of shots. Something whined through the air from the direction of the door and Rayburn stared at a jagged hole high in the panelling. Without thinking, he opened the door, took a step forward and stared at what lay before him.

The man was Nagati, and he was dead. The aide had fallen on his back and his features were brilliantly illuminated by a spotlight from one of the cars halted outside the house. The same light also showed the pulpy redness of his chest and the opening where a bullet had torn its way from the body. Close to the dead man rested a small box of inlaid ivory.

"Don't touch that!"

Rayburn halted the motion of his arm and squinted towards the light. "What's that?"

"Don't move!" A man stepped forward, his body huge against the

light. He wore a heavy-duty cover-skin and carried a bundle in one hand. "Catch!" He threw the bundle towards the senator. "Go inside a little way, not too far, and leave the door open. Strip naked and put on that cover-skin. Hurry."

"Why should I?" Rayburn remembered who and what he was. "I am Senator Rayburn of the World Council and . . ."

"Shut your mouth and do as you're told!" Light glinted from the barrel of a rifle. "I'm not arguing, mister. Personally, I'd rather not kill you, but I will if I have to."

"You'd kill me?"

"You wouldn't be the first." The man wasn't boasting, he was just stating a fact. "I'm sorry about this, but it's your own fault. You shouldn't have opened the door. Now that you've been exposed we've no choice but to take you in and put you in close quarantine. Now, get that cover-skin on and don't waste any more time."

Rayburn glanced once at the dead man, then began to undress with fingers which trembled on the zips and buttons. The air was dank and he shivered as he donned the plastic cover-skin, fumbling awkwardly with the

seams and fastenings. It wasn't so much the cold which made him shiver as the sudden realisation that the guard had meant exactly what he'd said.

"What are you going to do with me?" Inside the garment his voice sounded too loud as it reflected back from the material. The answer, when it came, was muffled.

"You'll be taken to a lazar house. You've been exposed to the possibility of infection and you'll have to wear that suit for the next thirty hours. If you've got the disease you'll die. If you haven't, then you're safe as long as you don't open that cover-skin. Understand?"

"I think so." Rayburn restrained a desire to vomit. The sight of Nagati, dead and broken, had done something to his stomach. Death, in the abstract, was one thing, but something quite different when actually on the doorstep. To talk of eliminating potential enemies was merely to make sounds. To see them dead was something else. "You'll inform the Council as to what has happened to me?"

"Sure. Senator Rayburn, you said?"

"That's right. And this man is Nagati, personal aide to Senator

Sucamari." He glanced at the box. Nagati must have been carrying it. "Take care of that, it may be important."

"We'll take care of it." The guard hesitated. "Sorry that I blew my top, senator, but it's been a hell of a night. I've never had to kill anyone before."

"And I've never seen anyone die." Rayburn looked again at the shattered chest and vacuous eyes of the dead man.

He had never had any strong feelings for Nagati. He had neither liked nor disliked him; not as he disliked Sucamari. He remembered how the aide had always seemed to be engrossed in a book; the sure sign of a lonely man. Books, to the lonely, are friends. Sometimes the only friends they have. Now Nagati had lost even those companions. But the bullet which had slammed into him had cost him more than a few books. It had cost him immortality.

Rayburn felt cold as he walked towards the waiting cars.

XVII

MIKE WAS SLEEPING WHEN Jelks arrived at the office. He didn't wake until the doctor

had shaken him, and then sat upright, rubbing his eyes.

"Doctor Jelks! I thought you were at the hospital."

"I was." Jelks rested a package on the desk. "Where's Sam?"

"In the rest room getting some sleep."

"Get him." Jelks sat down as Mike left the office. Normally he would have joked with the secretary, but not now. Now he had no time or thought for anything but what he had discovered, and what had to be decided. He closed his burning eyes, then started, conscious that he had almost fallen asleep.

"You wanted me?" Sam sat heavily on a chair. He was haggard with fatigue.

"Yes." Jelks fumbled for cigarettes and couldn't find any. He'd been doing the same thing on and off for the past few hours, always forgetting to beg some after he had discovered that he was without. Mike saw the gesture, guessed what the doctor wanted and took a pack of his own from his desk.

"Here."

"Thanks." Jelks ripped open the package, annoyed at himself for the way his hands trembled. He was tired, yes, but he had been tired before. Fatigue shouldn't

knot a man's stomach and fill his mouth with the taste of fear. He leaned forward as Mike offered a light and dragged smoke deep into his lungs. It tasted hot and acrid, something like burning feathers, but it stilled his craving. Or was it a craving? Maybe smoking was just a habit, a conditioned reflex similar to those Pavlov had discovered? He became aware that Sam was speaking.

"What did you want me for, Doc?"

"Private business." Jelks glanced at the secretary. "Send him outside."

"What?" Mike was indignant. Sam cut short his objections.

"Leave us. See if you can hunt up some coffee somewhere." He waited until Mike had left. "You had a reason for that?"

"A damn good reason." Jelks reached for the package he had brought with him. "This is for you alone, Sam. What you decide after what I'm going to tell you is up to you. I've spent hours trying to figure it out and I can't do it." He looked at the parcel. "I've found the source of the disease."

"You have!" Sam was interested. "Tell me about it."

"One of the patrols shot a man. He was trying to enter Rayburn's

house when they got him, and he was carrying what's in that parcel. Rayburn came to the door at the wrong time and now he's in tight quarantine. Did you know that?"

"Mike had the report." Sam wasn't interested in the senator. "That isn't important."

"No." Jelks drew at his cigarette. "Rayburn isn't important, but the man they shot is. The man was Nagati, and he was carrying this box."

"This?" Sam unwrapped the parcel and stared at the box. He ran his fingers over it until he found the hidden spring. The lid snapped open and he stared at the statue it contained. It shone with the peculiar lustre of polished ivory.

"It's clean," said Jelks. "I gave both it and the box the sonic and ultra violet treatment, and they couldn't hurt a baby. But when I received them the statue was coated with a nutrient culture for the new bacteria."

"I see." Sam closed the box, opened it again, then shut it with a snap. "Nagati, you said?"

"Yes." Jelks leaned forward. "Are you thinking what I am, Sam?"

"Maybe." Sam rested the box on the desk, then sat down and stared at it. He was a policeman

and he was good at his job. Within his mind a jumble of pieces suddenly fell together to form a recognisable pattern. It all fitted, Augustine's death, the petty thief and the consequent outbreak of the disease. The summons for a messenger from the Japanese legation; a summons which they had denied. The missing girl and the Oriental nature of the box itself. Why Augustine had tampered with the parcel he didn't know, but that was not important. Neither was the irony which had made the statue of Buddha the carrier for the vile bacteria. The important thing was that he now knew who had tried to murder a city. Or had the main target been a nation? He grew conscious of Jelks staring at him.

"Why should Nagati have tried to deliver this thing to Rayburn?"

"Coincidence," said Jelks. "He was running the patrol gauntlet and they spotted him. He was terrified and tried to take cover. I doubt if he even knew just where he was or who lived in the house." He became thoughtful. "Or maybe there's another reason. Rayburn doesn't like the Orient and isn't backward in saying so."

"Assassination?" Sam considered it, then rejected it. "No. The

first reason is probably the correct one. Nagati wouldn't have wanted Rayburn to have discovered what was in this box. Can you imagine what would happen if Rayburn managed to tie what has happened here with the Orient?"

"That's why I'm here," said Jelks simply. "I didn't know what to do. Should I have destroyed it and forgotten what I discovered, or should I broadcast it? I just don't know, Sam. I'm a doctor, not a politician."

"Neither am I," reminded Sam. "But you don't have to be a politician to guess what would happen if Rayburn found proof that the Orient was responsible for what has hit New York. He would accuse them of a plot to exterminate all human life in this hemisphere, and he could be right. But what happens then? Can we wipe out the Orient because of the work of a few fanatics? And if this was a national and not a private attempt, wouldn't they hit back?"

"Don't ask me." Jelks made a helpless gesture. "I can't handle it."

"And you think I can?" Sam jerked to his feet and paced the floor. "Damn it, Jelks, I'm only a captain in the World Police. I can't decide whether or not the

world shall be plunged into war. It's outside my authority."

"Passing the buck, Sam?"

"Aren't you?"

"Yes," said Jelks slowly. "I suppose that I am." He looked down at his hands. "I'm used to making decisions, I do it every time I operate, but this isn't like that. There's more than the life of one man at stake, and I don't have the facts on which to base a judgment. Is this an isolated incident? Is it the work of a few fanatics? Or is this just the prelude to a global war and the end of humanity? Can we dare to treat it as a local thing, or should we broadcast what we know?"

"To do that means war," said Sam. He stared at the box. "You've told no one else about this?"

"No."

"Are you going to?"

"No, not unless you decide that I should." Jelks shifted on his chair. "What are you going to do, Sam?"

"There's only one thing I can do." Sam wrapped the box and handed it to Jelks. "Before we decide we must have the truth, all of it. Have you got anything which will make a man tell the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth?"

"I can get it. The medical room will have some."

"Then get it and meet me downstairs." Sam rose and headed towards the door. "Hurry, Jelks, we've got a date at the Japanese Consulate."

Sucamari sat alone in his Consulate tasting the bitterness of defeat and self-reproach. Everything had gone wrong from the moment when that fool of a girl had disobeyed his orders. The plan, so carefully conceived and carried out, had failed at the last moment. And the fault was his own. He had been guilty of excessive caution, forgetting, in his fear of retaliation, that great enterprises cannot be devoid of all risk.

He started at a pounding at the door, waited for a moment until he realised that all the servants were asleep, then hurried to the door with the vague hope that, somehow, Nagati had finally managed to return. The hope died as Sam and Jelks stepped forward. Behind them a patrol car, heavy with armed men, gave a touch of menace to the silent street.

"Gentlemen!" Sucamari smiled with automatic reflex. "This is an honour."

"Is it?" Sam brushed past the senator and entered the study. Jelks followed him, hugging the parcel in his arms. Sucamari glanced at it and felt a sudden fear. Despite that fear he was still smiling as he joined the others, closing the study door softly behind him. The smile annoyed Sam and, to cover his irritation, he stared at a solidio-graph of Fujiyama, the model of the sacred mountain looking wonderfully realistic in the block of clear plastic. He turned as Jelks unwrapped the parcel.

"Do you recognise this box?"

"Should I?"

"I think you should," said Sam.

"It is the contents of the parcel Augustine was delivering from someone in your legation. Nagati was carrying it." He paused. "We know all about it."

"You talk in riddles, captain." Sucamari clung desperately to the knowledge that, even now, there was no proof against him. No proof at all. They had the box and probably they had Nagati, but the aide would not talk. "What is it that you say you know?"

"Open the box." Sam pushed it across the desk towards the senator. "Open it!"

"There is no need to shout." Sucamari's fingers were clumsy

as he fumbled with the box. He took a long time finding the spring and, when he pressed it, he stared for a long time at the statue.

"Your Devil's mixture has gone," said Sam bitterly. "But it has done enough damage. More than three thousand people have so far lost their lives because of it. You should be proud at what you have done."

"I?" Sucamari lost his smile. "Are you insane? Must I remind you who and what I am? How dare you infer that I am to blame for what has happened!"

"Stop it!" Sam fought the impulse to smash his fist against the other's mouth. "This isn't a game we're playing. The time for verbal fencing is past. You know what happens next." He nodded to Jelks and stepped towards the door.

"Wait!" Sucamari licked lips which had suddenly grown dry. "What are you going to do?"

"You are under arrest." Sam was curt. "You will be put on trial and, with the evidence I have against you, the verdict is predictable. You will probably be lobotomized and set to forced labour for the term of your natural life. I shouldn't have to tell you what the other repercussions will be; you know the political situation better than I do."

"War," said Sucamari. "The frenzied terror of a nation of children who will seek to find safety in the destruction of humanity." He stared down at the shining perfection of the Buddha, not seeing the age-old craftsmanship of the statue. It was over, finished, the great plan which had taken so much preparation and which could not be repeated. But though the plan was finished the incident was not. He looked at Sam. "The Orient is innocent in this."

"A nation is responsible for the actions of its representatives," reminded Sam. "But that is beside the point. The guilt of the Orient, or its innocence, can be established at your trial."

"No!" Sucamari felt perspiration ooze on his forehead. No matter what came out at the trial, the damage would be done. Rayburn would pounce like a hungry jackal and, innocent or not, the Orient would suffer. He, and the other Occidental representatives, would demand full retaliatory measures to be taken against the East. It was a thing which he had to avoid, and the only way he could do that was by full and frank confession.

Sam heard him out, his face impassive.

"It is the truth," Sucamari said. "I swear it on my honour."

"Honour?" Sam didn't smile, but it would have been better if he had. He looked at Jelks. "All right, doctor, you know what to do."

"I know." Jelks took a hypogun from his pocket and stepped forward to face the senator. "Bare your arm, please."

"What is this?" Sucamari stared from the doctor to Sam and back to the doctor again. "What are you going to do?"

"We are going to inject you with a drug with a fancy name," said Sam. "Call it a truth serum and you will be as nearly correct as anything. It numbs the censor and opens the mind to questioning. You will feel no ill effects but, while beneath the influence of the drug, you will be unable to lie, retain information or be other than helpful."

"I understand." Sucamari bared his arm and watched as the doctor operated the hypogun. The high-pressured chemical penetrated the skin without pain, entering directly into the bloodstream. Jelks glanced at his watch.

"Thirty seconds," he said. "Then talk."

Sucamari talked.

He talked easily, fully, hiding nothing and wanting to hide

nothing. He did more than just answer questions, he volunteered information, stripping his soul and confessing the motivations behind what he had done. He repeated what he had said before, but this time added details and his honesty was without question.

"What are you going to do, Sam?" Jelks had drawn the captain away from earshot of the senator. Sucamari sat and smiled at the solidiograph of Fujiyama. It was a genuine smile, not the artificial one he had cultivated so long, the smile of a man who has finally found inner peace by a complete dropping of his mental barricades.

"There's only one thing I can do," said Sam. "This isn't a national matter, but the work of fanatics. Yet if we take him to trial who will believe that?" Sam hesitated. "He was telling the truth?"

"Of course. He was physically incapable of telling anything else."

"I see." Sam returned to the senator. "This house is guarded," he said. "Set foot outside the door and you will be shot. It will be a regrettable accident, but you will be shot just the same." He paused. "Need I say more?"

"You are very explicit." Sucamari drew a shuddering breath. He picked up the box, looked at

Buddha inside, then closed the door. "It would please me if you took this. It is a rare piece and not without value, but take it for more than that. Accept it as a thank offering."

"I will collect it on my return," said Sam evenly. "Shall we say two hours?"

"I understand." Sucamari set down the box. "One other thing. Nagati?"

"Dead."

Sucamari stared at the closing door. A turbine whined in the street as the patrol car took Sam and Jelks back to the World Council buildings, the resulting silence seeming somehow more impressive than before. He had guessed that his aide was dead but it was still a shock to learn the truth. Nagati had been more than a servant to him; he had been almost a brother. Sucamari knew that he would miss him.

A small room opened from the study, a room with lacquered walls, hung with embroidered tapestries. A Shinto shrine stood at one end and a pair of Samurai swords hung against one wall. The place was heavy with the pungent scent of incense.

Sucamari undressed, stripping himself naked before donning a

robe of yellow silk. He took joss sticks from a cedar chest, lit them and set them before the shrine. He placed a soft cushion on the floor then, moving almost as if he were in a dream, he took down the swords from the wall.

There were two of them, one long the other short. Regretfully, he set the long one aside and, holding the other, slowly drew the blade from its lacquered scabbard. The steel was brightly polished and the soft light from the shrine flared from the razor-edge so that it looked feathery and unreal, the "cloud-edge" which was the hall-mark of the ancient craftsmen who had made the weapons of the warrior class.

Sucamari stared at it for a long time, letting his fingers caress the steel, his eyes blank and his face impassive. Kneeling on the cushion, he opened his robe so that the light gleamed on his yellow skin. Taking up the short sword he held it in both hands, the point aimed towards his stomach, his knuckles whitening as he gripped the hilt.

Now he missed Nagati. His friend should have stood by his side, the long sword naked in his hands, ready to strike the fatal blow should his courage fail. But Nagati was dead, and

what he had to do he had to do alone.

Sucamari tensed himself, then drove the short sword deep into the pit of his stomach.

He was a long time dying.

XVIII

THREE DAYS AFTER THE END OF the general quarantine New York had almost returned to normal. The substrips were moving again, the streets and sidewalks clogged with their usual traffic but, over the still-quarantined sections, thin columns of smoke rose towards the sky. The sterilization squads were still at work burning the dead and the condemned buildings. They would be reduced to ash, the sites would be cleared and new buildings would rear in their place, a permanent memorial to the horror which had struck and passed away.

Sam Falkirk stood at his office window and stared at the columns of smoke, then let his eyes drift over the jagged skyline of the city. Behind him the small sounds of office routine were suddenly broken. He turned as Jelks walked towards him.

"Well, Sam, it's all over." Sleep and end of strain had

restored the doctor's good humour. "Lanridge tells me that another two days and we can forget the whole episode."

"Can we?" Sam stared thoughtfully at the doctor. "Tell me, when you treat a patient suffering from boils are you happy just to clear up the local infection or do you wonder why he got it in the first place?"

"I look for the cause of the trouble," said Jelks immediately. "Treating symptoms has been out of date for a long time. What made you mention boils? Have you any?"

"I haven't." Sam gestured towards the city outside the window. "But society has."

"I know what you mean." Jelks glanced to where Mike sat before the intercom. "Let's go somewhere where we can talk."

The visitors' gallery was closed, but Sam's uniform gained them entry. Jelks sat on one of the public benches and stared down into the assembly chamber where the minor officials of the Council were busy preparing for the day's business. A couple of newsfax reporters smoked as they tested their equipment.

"I heard about Sucamari," said Jelks quietly. He looked at

Sam. "If he hadn't done it himself, would you . . .?"

"I would." Sam remembered what he had found when he had returned to the Consulate. "Nasty way to die."

"Hari-kiri?" Jelks nodded. "I agree, but he didn't do it properly. The trick is to drag the blade sideways so as to effect a complete disembowelment. When that happens shock and loss of blood bring almost immediate death. Sucamari muffed the job; he should have had a friend to help him out."

"Maybe." Sam didn't want to talk about it. "Did you cover your end?"

"Yes. I reported that the bacteria was a mutated strain of low survival factor and would probably not be repeated."

"Is Lanridge going to believe that?"

"I hope so. I covered it with plenty of jargon and hinted that a leaking atomic generator could be the cause. Thin, but it's as good an excuse as any." Jelks pursed his lips. "It's probably true in part at that. That bacteria was not a normal culture. Sucamari was a little crazy, but cunning with it. If he'd managed to introduce the stuff into that beef extract as he planned we'd have been wiped out." Jelks rubbed

the fingers of his right hand over the back of his left. "Did you . . ."

"I did. On paper, everything's clear. Augustine was the initial carrier, the parcel isn't mentioned, and Sucamari killed himself over grief for his friend. I even sent the box and statue to Rayburn. He'd seen it, remember, and I thought it best. He can test it any way he wants to, it won't tell him anything." Sam shrugged. "It was as unofficial as hell, but I cleared up the mess. It won't happen again until the next time."

"The next time?"

"Sucamari's dead and his plot died with him," said Sam. "But the conditions which gave birth to his crazy idea haven't altered for anything but the worse. We were lucky in managing to stamp out this one infection, but does that eliminate the possibility that there will be others?"

"Like a man with boils," said Jelks. "You've got to hit at the root, not treat the symptoms."

"That's about it," said Sam. "But how can you cure the disease without killing the patient? Society's sick, Jelks. We're not geared for longevity. We're not even geared to a machine civilization, and we've got both. Maybe we should just hand over to the Blues and let them run things. At least, they're mature."

"No." Jelks was serious. "I won't deny that it's been talked about, and quite a lot of Blues are all for the idea. We could do it, you know, Sam. It wouldn't be hard to move in; a little bloody perhaps, but not hard. Not when half the population are Blues. But it wouldn't be the right way."

"It may be the only way," said Sam. "Let the Blues work and support the youngsters. It makes sense."

"It would lead to stasis." Jelks produced cigarettes, offered them and lit his own. He smiled as he pocketed the package. "Remind me to repay Mike for those cigarettes he gave me. I figure that I owe him at least a carton."

"Keep to the point. Why would it lead to stasis?"

"For the same reason that the Chinese culture remained static until the impact of Western ideology. The old aren't progressive, Sam; we have proof of that. In the century prior to Blue we advanced from steam to atomic power. Since Blue we've done little. We've built a few houses, started a few sea farms, turned to hydroponics, but only because we had to. But we haven't made any real progress.

Old men are conservative and are afraid to take chances. They don't like change and will fight against it. The Chinese were in stasis because of their ancestor worship; to improve the methods used by their fathers was tantamount to sacrilege. You can see the analogy."

Sam could see it; it affected every sphere of life. The old did not die and so could not be forgotten. The Western nations had never been ancestor-worshippers, but they were rapidly becoming so. A man can't deny his own parents, grandparents and great-grandparents, not when they are around all the time. Orthodox religion, even though few practised it, had left its mark. The Fifth Commandment still had power. And it was all the more powerful because it was impossible to forget that, one day, every man and woman would become a Blue.

"Space flight could have saved us," said Jelks, and Sam realised that the doctor was almost talking to himself. "But when Shizzy Murphy died the oldsters got scared. They were still in control then and it took a lot of money to provide that tomb circling the Earth. They needed that money for other things, and perhaps they

were right. But space flight could have saved us."

"It still can," reminded Sam. "Don't forget Prosper."

"One man can't save a world." Jelks turned as the doors at the end of the gallery opened and a few visitors filed in. They were tourists from the Mid-West, and one of them, a farmer by his appearance, was talking to a friend. He didn't seem to think it necessary to lower his voice.

"I tell you I got it straight from Waterman. It's a fact."

"Waterman ain't the Senator," said the friend. He was plainly sceptical. "What's Rayburn want to back Prosper for anyway? How's that going to help us?"

"That's what we're here to find out. Now shut up and listen; he'll be on the floor in a minute."

"Did you know about this?" Jelks looked at Sam, then down into the assembly chamber. "Is Rayburn going to back Prosper's Aphrodite Project?"

"I don't know." Sam was gently humorous. "I've been busy lately, remember? But if Rayburn's really found himself another hobby-horse, then I'm grateful. It'll take his mind off Sucamari and the Orient." He fell silent as the assembly got down to business.

Outwardly Rayburn looked just as he had always done, the down-to-earth, plain-speaking farmer who knew the value of a dollar, and who wasn't going to be swindled in no horse-trade. But now he was quieter, more subdued, and he waited his turn to speak without any of the irritating gestures he had formerly used to attract attention to himself from the chair. Something had obviously happened to the Senator.

That something was thirty hours in a cover-skin waiting to die.

It was an experience which Rayburn would never forget. At first he had been numbed with the shock of Nagati's death, then, as the true horror of his situation had fully registered, he had gone a little mad.

The guards had taken him to a lazar house, thrust him in a room with a hundred others, warned him not to open his protective covering, then left him to pass the next thirty hours as best as he could. Those thirty hours had been a simple preview of Hell.

It was the uncertainty more than anything else, the not knowing if he was going to live or die. Rayburn had always feared death, and in that he was normal. No one now could be philoso-

phical about something which need not happen. Death was no longer inevitable. Men fought to live, insisted on every safeguard against accidents which could cripple or maim, and regarded death in the same light that the early Christians had regarded Original Sin.

Men had died in the lazar house. There had been cursing and praying to a God which most had forgotten. There had been some fighting, and several had gone completely insane. And Rayburn had experienced a foretaste of war.

He had always advocated war; not in honest, outright terms, but in ambiguous phrasology. He had supported a programme which would have led to open hostilities and he had considered that programme justified. But it was one thing to talk of destroying an enemy and another to see that enemy spilling blood on your doorstep. One thing to laud the glories of combat, another to be the victim of combat.

Sitting in the lazar house, Rayburn had learned the meaning of fear. It was the fear which the entire world had once known, the nerve-sapping knowledge that he was just a unit among other units, and was defenceless to protect himself or to protest

against the thing that had been done to him. He understood a little of the horror of war and, as the hours dragged past and his fear mounted, something happened to the Senator.

He became suddenly adult.

Adults, real adults, do not engage in the wanton waste of war. Mature people are constructive, not destructive, and, to the grown, life is a precious thing and not to be thrown aside for the sake of imagined insult, pride, the tap of a drum or the flutter of a pennant. Rayburn, when he left the lazar house, together with twenty survivors of the original hundred, was not the same man as when he went in.

"Incredible!" Jelks leaned back as Rayburn terminated his opening address. "He means it. He really means it."

"If you're surprised, then look at the others." Sam gestured to where the newsfax reporters were sweating over their instruments. "But why has he suddenly swung from Nationalism to an outright support of Prosper? I didn't know that Rayburn had the slightest interest in space flight." He rose to his feet. "Let's find Waterman and get to the bottom of this."

Gerald Waterman was in his Legation's office. He had pleaded a headache and Rayburn, surprisingly considerate, had not insisted that he attend the assembly chamber. Not that it was necessary for him to attend at all; Gerald knew exactly what the Senator was going to say and how he had arranged his support. What worried him was what the Mariguana group would say when they learned that their dream of taking over a new world and using it as their private empire had burst like an over-ripe melon.

He straightened as Sam and Jelks entered the office; listened to what they had to say, then nodded. "It's true, right enough," he said gloomily. "I don't know what happened to the Senator, but he sent for Prosper as soon as he was freed from quarantine and the two of them have had their heads together ever since."

"Then he's sincere about this?" Jelks still couldn't believe it.

"He's sincere enough," sighed Gerald. "If you'd listened to half the propaganda I have, you couldn't doubt it."

"Amazing!" Jelks looked at Sam and raised his eyebrows. "Do you remember what I said about space flight providing the answer?"

"I remember." Sam was thoughtful. He had the mental image of a growing weight crushing down on the world, a weight which had to be syphoned away—and quickly. But was Prosper the answer? Would his ship really work? Gerald had the answer to that.

"Rayburn's got it all worked out," he said. "Prosper swears that we can live on Venus, so the Senator is going to start with ten ships and set up a regular schedule to carry Blues to the new world. The cloud layer affords protection from the ultra-violet," he explained, "so the environment should prove ideal for albinos."

"That's us," said Jelks. "But can he get the Council to agree to the project?"

"He can." Gerald was very positive. "He's already made deals with the other senators, especially those of the Asiatic Bloc. He's agreed to vote for the Calcutta project and others like it if they'll back his new motion. They will, of course; they'll only be too glad to get him out of their hair. And he'll have the farm vote of his own area firm behind him all the way. Those farmers will jump at the chance of free land, even if they can't get it until

after they've taken the treatment and it's on another world."

He wasn't happy about it. The Mariguana group had wanted Rayburn to support their new company, but only in order to use government money to save their own. But the Senator had literally taken over the project and Gerald could guess why. Rayburn had to have a hobby-horse and, now that he had turned from Nationalism, Prosper offered the perfect substitute. It was harmless, constructive and could provide what Rayburn wanted most of all—personal power after he had taken the treatment. He, too, had realised that, on Venus, the old laws need not apply, and could not apply, if the immigrants were all Blues. If the project succeeded he could remain in politics for centuries.

But the Mariguana group weren't going to like what had happened. They had been overbearing with Prosper, and it was natural that he should have deserted them for any other backer. They had underestimated Rayburn, he intended to be nobody's servant. They had bossed their own family for so long that they had forgotten that others would not recognise their power, but they wouldn't think of that. The blame would, inevitably, be

placed on Gerald. He was too busy thinking about it to notice when Sam and Jelks left the office.

They halted by a window overlooking the city and stared at the sprawling mass of buildings below, each busy with his thoughts.

"It will work," said Jelks positively. "With Prosper's ships we can colonize Venus. I know it."

"Does age bring pre-vision?" Sam wasn't being ironic. "How can you be so sure?"

"I'm sure," said Jelks. "The idea of space flight isn't new; we could have reached the planets fifty years ago if we'd really wanted to. Now we're going to reach them because we have to. And, after them, the stars. Man is due to expand beyond the world of his birth, Sam. And there's no telling where it will end."

"A dream," said Sam. "Prosper's had it all his life. Why did he have to wait so long?"

"Because it wasn't time." Jelks was serious. "Things happen because they must, Sam, not because men want them to. The Greeks could have had steam power; they knew about it, but it remained a toy because it wasn't due to appear. We advanced from steam power to atomic energy in a

single lifetime. Why? Was it because our fossil fuels were becoming exhausted? Or was it because atomic power is essential for space flight? Blue discovered his serum just as we were ready to venture into space. Again coincidence?"

"What else? Are you trying to tell me that we are just pawns in a colossal game of chess? Or that all our achievements are the result of destiny?"

"I don't know." Jelks shook his head. "Maybe if I knew what makes the eel travel across the ocean from the Sargasso, or why lemmings migrate, I could give you an answer. They do what they do because they must." He gave a short laugh. "I'm not a religious man, Sam, but it's hard to dismiss the concept of a power greater than ourselves working with and by us. You know what's going to happen, don't you? All the old legends and promises will come true. Men are going to die and then go to another world. It will be legal death, and the other world will be Venus, but that makes no difference. And after Venus will come the stars with their infinity of worlds. Enough worlds and enough space to take care of all the immortals there could ever be.

The old will go, Sam, and the young, the meek, will inherit the Earth."

It was true, and Sam knew it. What Jelks had said would happen because it must. Mankind had to expand. Long life demanded a wide stage on which to act itself out. Immortality demanded nothing less than the universe.

So the ships would go to Venus, and after that to the stars, and each ship would bear away from the mother world those men and women who had reached maturity. An adult in a playpen is a nuisance, a dead weight on the imagination and development of the children. A stultifying influence, respected but unwanted. But, equally so, children could not be at home among the stars. So Earth would remain the cradle of the race, but the universe would supply the room in which the adults could move.

Sam drew a deep breath, feeling a sudden, tremendous lightening of his heart. But he was not thinking of the distant future nor the destiny which men, all unknowing, were working out. He was thinking of more immediate things.

He was thinking of Carmen, and marriage, and the children he was no longer afraid to have.

EVE NO ADAM

by NIGEL LLOYD

Every woman knows that she is the boss. Some women disguise it, others aren't so subtle. It was unfortunate for posterity that Adam's mother had been the latter kind.

IT WASN'T coincidence that he was always first on the list. His mother had seen to that when she'd married his father and fought her way onto the social register. A little discreet alteration and she arrived where she'd always wanted to be. Aaron became Aabaten and if there was a name with a lower alphabetical rating she hadn't heard of it. When the only child she was ever destined to bear lay wriggling in his cot the importance of names had already proved itself to her beyond all argument.

"He must be the first," she said emphatically. "Let me see now, Aleb? Abel? No, he was murdered. Adam? Yes, Adam; he was pretty important, too, wasn't he?"

"Pretty important," agreed her husband. If he felt a little pity for his offspring he knew better than to show it. Arguing with his wife was, as he had learned, both useless and painful. Anyway, the kid could always change his name if he wanted to.

"Adam," she murmured thoughtfully. "Adam Aabaten, nice?"

"Very nice." Her spouse cleared his throat. "How about a middle name? I was thinking of naming him after grandfather."

"What name is that, dear?"

"Zachary. I thought . . ." He sighed at his wife's expression. "No?"

"No." She was firm about it. "Not Zachary. Not," she added quickly, "that it isn't a nice

name. But it's right at the end. You don't want Adam to be last all the time, do you?"

No, he said, he didn't want that.

"Something significant. Something which will inspire him. Something," she gestured towards the cot, "at the beginning of the alphabet."

"Bill," he suggested hopefully. "A nice name, Bill."

"But not symbolic."

"Charles?"

"He was beheaded," she reminded. "Earl?"

"Not Earl."

"Why not?" A distant expression came into her eyes. "Earl Aabaten," she said softly. "I think it's rather nice."

"It's too common," he protested. "You'll have them thinking he's a band leader; they're all Earls and Dukes and Lords." He sought desperately for an alternative. "Alpha."

"Alpha?"

"It comes from the Greek," he explained. "The first letter in their alphabet. Scientists use it to designate the first of anything. You know, alpha, beta, gamma."

"The first in the alphabet?" She was interested. "Adam Alpha Aabaten." She repeated it. "Adam Alpha Aabaten. A.A.A." She smiled down at her son. "That's

what we'll name him. It should inspire him always to be the first, always to take the lead and keep it."

She didn't add, because she didn't know, that it would also save his life.

Twenty-five years later Adam found himself sole occupant of a probe rocket heading for Venus. The sole human occupant, that is. He had a couple of canaries, ditto in rabbits, a pair of monkeys and five rats. Someone back at the satellite had been careless about the rats; they should have numerically matched the other animal life. The ship, appropriately enough, was code-named the Ark.

It wasn't coincidence that Adam had been chosen as the pilot. No matter how equal a group of young men might be, how close their respective qualifications, their names have to be written down on a list. Officialdom being what it is, such names are placed alphabetically. Human nature being what it is, the first name, the one at the top, always seems to be the best.

And the symbolism hadn't escaped General Welkin who was in charge of the project. He was something of a fatalist; no one knowing what he knew could be otherwise if he hoped to remain

sane, and he had a streak of mysticism buried deep down inside. Had one of the candidates been named Noah, then he would have got the job. There wasn't, so Adam got it by default.

He didn't want the job, but had had no choice. Mother had wanted him to take it just as she had wanted him to go into space to begin with. It was glamorous, respectable and something to be proud of. It also paid well and offered a path to rapid promotion. Adam, as usual, had accepted the inevitable and obeyed his mother.

He consoled himself by talking to the livestock.

"Women," he said profoundly, "are the very devil. If it wasn't for women I wouldn't be here, stuck way out in space acting as nursemaid to a collection of mangy vermin." He caught one of the canaries looking at him. "Sorry, reptiles and vermin. Anyway, you're all parasites, the lot of you, just like women."

The male monkey paused in his eternal, useless search for fleas and shook the wire separating him from the female monkey. The female monkey shrieked, gibbered and acted hard to get. Watching, Adam wasn't certain who was the most annoyed, the male because he couldn't get at

the female, or the female because she couldn't be got at.

"Just like a human," he said sorrowfully. "You just don't know what you're letting yourself in for. You see something that looks nice and you chase it until you're caught. Then you've got to support her for the rest of your life. And not just feed her, oh, no! You've got to work yourself into ulcers and heart strain so that she can wear nice clothes, own a nice apartment, employ a nurse to take care of her kids, a governess to teach them, a private tutor to make sure they know their duties in the world. And for what? Just so that you can break down that wire."

The male monkey swore at him.

"So you think I don't know what I'm talking about?" Adam sighed. "That's all you know. I've been through it, pal, am still going through it. They say it's a man's world, but that's all the bunk. Women own the world, lock, stock and barrel. To them men are just work-horses, someone to go out and bring home the bacon. Plenty of bacon, too, don't forget that." He hunched forward, staring at the ape. "And you know what happens when the poor guy gets tired or loses his grip? Do they let him out to

pasture? Do they hell! They divorce the guy, skin him for alimony and run around looking for a fresh sucker. Or they work him to death so they can collect his insurance. I tell you, pal, a man just can't win."

One of the rats rasped at the wire cage, and a canary—Adam could never tell them apart—whistled in what he thought was a derisive manner.

"Laugh," he said. "Laugh your fool head off, but you'll be sorry. Wait until we get to Venus. You know what happens then? Well, I'll tell you. I'm going to let you loose, all of you. Then you'll see."

The radio burped just then and he had to leave his charges. Later he took his revenge by increasing spin to one and a half G. Not that it did any good.

Venus was a cloud world of fog and mist and perpetual rain. The air, surprisingly, was breathable but the humidity was awful. That and the heat. Adam thought that he could have stood one without the other, but not both at the same time. The animals, apparently, didn't mind local conditions a bit. Or perhaps they had something else on their minds.

"All right," said Adam, just

before take-off. "I've checked this world as far as I can, and you should be able to make out. You can eat, breathe and drink all the water you can hold. The only thing you can't do is to sunbathe, but apart from that you can live the life of Riley. Not," he added to the males, "that you'll get a chance of doing anything like that. Not if I know women, you won't."

Back in space again he felt lonely. The animals hadn't been much company, but they had been alive and something to talk to. Sitting alone trying to remember that he was heading for home as fast as his ion-jets could push him grew boring. He busied himself with checking the ship, testing and examining everything a dozen times even, in desperation, reading the few books which he had been allowed. They didn't help either.

One was all about Joan of Arc; another went into details on the life of the Virgin Queen, a third was a painful romance about a brave little woman struggling to provide herself with enough diamonds and mink to keep out the cold. There were a couple of detectives; a bitter novel on the life and death of a business magnate and what was obviously supposed to be a humor-

ous item about the adventures of three wenches on the trail of fame, fortune and happiness via the matrimonial route.

Adam wasn't amused. An alien, reading the books, would have assumed that Earth was a matriarchy; that men existed for the sole purpose of dancing attendance on the females, and that the males were regarded by the other half of the population as some kind of beast of burden. A conclusion with which Adam heartily agreed.

Dumping the books through the disposal unit, he made a last tour of the ship, tried to sleep, tried to think of something he hadn't thought of before, and thought dark thoughts about his mother and her ambition which had driven his father to step in front of a turbine car and himself into space. The turbine car had been travelling at over a hundred miles an hour and his father's worries had been over for a full decade. His were waiting for him when he landed. Adam tried to console himself with the radio.

And learned that the world had finally committed suicide.

After the first shock Adam couldn't honestly say that he was surprised. It had been brewing

too long, and it had only been a matter of time. Once the right button had been pressed the rest followed automatically. Rocket missiles, atomic bombs, radioactive dusts, the rain of hell-fire from the satellites, it was as inevitable as two and two making four. The war, so the wheezing voice from the radio informed what was left of the universe, had lasted less than a week.

Vaguely, Adam regretted having missed the fireworks. The view, from the satellite, must have been superb. Not that they would have had long to enjoy it; ground-based missiles would have been reaching upwards even as satellite-based rockets lanced down. It had been all fire and fuss and fury, and, after the roaring and banging had faded, the winds and rain had quietly finished the job.

The wheezing voice—it was a recording—faltered as it repeated its message. Mechanical trouble, Adam guessed. There must be enough radiation and radioactive residues flying around to upset the most carefully shielded installation. Or perhaps the installation wasn't shielded at all. The voice suggested that it was a ham outfit coupled to a magnetic tape. Whatever the rig, the voice faded out mid-way through the message and silence, broken only

by the crackle-static of the void, echoed from the radio.

It was, Adam thought, a fitting epitaph for the end of Man.

It also brought home the fact that he was quite alone.

Being alone didn't bother him. He had been selected to pilot the rocket partly because he could stand his own company, but a lifetime of solitude required certain necessities which the spaceship couldn't supply. He had to land somewhere, if only to restock. During the remaining two days of his flight, Adam gave the matter a great deal of thought.

The satellites were out; they would have all been destroyed by now, and landing on Earth itself would be useless. He could do it, but once down he wouldn't be able to get up again. Efficient as the ion-rockets were, they needed fuel, and his supplies were low. Anyway, if the broadcasted voice had told the truth, the planet was now nothing but a graveyard. The only thing left was Moon Base itself.

It didn't take much fuel to land on the Moon and Adam thought it justified, but when he stared at the base he recognised failure. The observatory and outer buildings had vanished and a huge crater marked the spot where they had been. The underground in-

stallations might have survived, but the mounting chatter from his geiger warned Adam not to push his luck too far. Intact or not, the underground chambers shared the radioactive death which had already turned Earth from green to brown.

Returning to his ship, Adam wriggled out of his space suit and slumped forlornly into a chair. With the Earth and Moon uninhabitable he only had two places to go. He had already been to Venus and hadn't liked what he'd seen. Mars could be better, but, on the other hand, it could be worse. He had enough fuel to get to either planet and land, but not enough to take-off again. Whatever his choice, it would be final.

He was still trying to make up his mind when a voice sounded from the radio.

A woman's voice.

She was about his own age, slim, rather mannish and very decided about what they should do.

"We'll have to find somewhere to settle down," she said. "That's obvious."

"Is it? I suppose it is." Adam sighed as he stared at her. Of all the people who could have survived the debacle, the survivor

had been a woman. A young woman at that, and a woman with very decided views of her own importance.

Not that there was anything very strange or wonderful about it. His own flight had received a certain amount of publicity and a certain glamour had attached itself to the first man to cross interplanetary space. Naturally, a woman had to go one better. Whether the feminine vote had been the decisive factor or whether Shelia Brownstone had been fortunate in her choice of relatives Adam didn't know.

The fact remained that she had crossed interplanetary space, to Mars instead of Venus, and now the two of them sat in his ship drinking his coffee and breathing his air.

"We can't stay on Mars," Shelia stated. "It's far too dry and cold. I simply couldn't be happy there."

"Could we live there?" Adam was interested.

"We could," she admitted reluctantly. "But we're not going to. It wouldn't be nice. Venus, now, sounds much better. It's warm, you say?"

"Hot." Adam sipped his coffee, wondering why it tasted so much better when he drank it alone. "Hot and damp. Very damp."

"And there are trees and things?"

"Yes."

"That's settled, then." She leaned back and held out her empty cup. The gesture was unmistakable. Adam rose and refilled it for her. She didn't bother to thank him.

"What's settled?"

"Where we settle. It will be on Venus, of course. You can build a house, clear some land and plant crops. It shouldn't take you long to capture and train some of the local wild life, and I can tell you how to prepare wool ready for weaving." She gave him a superior smile. "I've studied primitive arts, you know; leatherwork, basket making, things like that." Almost she simpered. "I've studied baby-care, too."

"How interesting." Adam couldn't think of anything more inappropriate. "Personal reasons?"

"Really!" The look she gave him reminded him of his mother. "It's just that I think every woman should know about such things. I know just how to mix their feeds and which are the best formulæ for different age groups."

"Nice," said Adam. He stared into his cup. "But won't things be a little different on Venus? If

we go there, I mean. There won't be any baby foods, you know, and . . ."

"I know." Somehow, she managed to look haggard. "Do you think that I haven't thought of it? Ever since I heard the news I've done nothing but think and plan for the future."

"You did?" Adam blinked. "But . . .?"

"I knew about your flight, naturally." Shelia was impatient. "I left after you did, remember. It was only a matter of time before we met." Lines marred the smooth expanse of her cheeks and forehead. "I must say you took your time getting back. I've been orbiting for days, just waiting for you."

"Sorry," said Adam automatically. "I was delayed on the planet."

"I knew that it would only be a matter of time before we met," she said. "I wasn't worried too much about that. It's what comes next that's important." Abruptly she dropped her cup and flung herself into his arms. "Oh, Adam! Be kind to me! Be gentle and patient! Try to understand!"

Adam gulped and looked at the mess she had made of his nice clean cabin. He caught their

reflection in a polished bulkhead and the scene seemed vaguely familiar. A woman, sobbing, begging a man to be gentle with her. It was the inevitable prelude to a woman demanding something. He had read about it a thousand times, seen it on every movie screen and had even watched his mother act out the same situation. And act was the word. He shoved her from his lap.

"What can I do? I can't have the babies for you, can I?"

"No. That is a woman's burden." She dabbed at her eyes and Adam thought, cynically, that she was being very brave. "But you can help me in so many little ways."

"Like chopping wood, building houses, clearing ground, farming, weaving, catching animals, mining, washing the clothes, hunting, sitting up with the kids all night and breaking my back to keep you alive all day; as well as acting as midwife, doctor, nurse, general skivvy and . . ."

"Is that the way you look at it!" She stared at him, horrified at the unexpected revolt. "But don't you see, Adam, that is a man's job. I'll be far too busy bringing up the children to have time for other things." Her voice softened. "Your children, Adam. Your own flesh and blood. And

there'll be sons to help you when they grow big." Tears glistened in her eyes. "Don't be cruel to me, Adam. I'd made such plans for the future."

"I bet you have." Adam struggled for a moment, and then gave up. After all, he supposed the race had to continue, and, as he was the only surviving male, he didn't seem to have much choice in the matter. He made a last effort to assert himself. "All right then, Venus it is. We'll take both ships and try to land where I touched down last time. Maybe we can locate some of those animals I released."

"Both ships?" Shelia looked surprised. "Can't we just transfer the supplies from my ship into yours?"

"Both ships." Adam was firm; he had no desire to start waiting on her before he had to. "In case of accidents," he explained. "And the metal will come in handy for our new home."

That, as he knew it would, ended the argument in his favour.

An hour later they were ready to start. Both ships hung suspended in the void well away from the Moon, and both had painstakingly aligned themselves for the flight to Venus. The radio burst into life after a brief moment

of silence and Adam sighed as the girl's voice echoed through the cabin.

"All ready, Adam. I'll go first and you follow right behind. And don't be late."

If that was meant to be humour, Adam wanted none of it. It reminded him too much of his mother, the same sharp tone of command hidden beneath a light covering of banter. Come to think of it, Shelia was a lot like his mother. She had the same shrewd eyes, the same thin mouth, the same air of granting a favour whenever she wanted something done. The coffee, for example . . .

"Ready, Adam?" This time there was no mistaking the bossy tone. "Listen to me now, because once I fire the rockets you won't be able to contact me until we're in free fall. Watch for my exhaust and fire immediately on half-G acceleration."

"I'm ready, Miss Brownstone."

"Really!" Her laugh was brittle. "So formal! You're as bad as General Welkin."

"Shelia, then." Anything for peace, thought Adam. Hopefully, he watched the sweep hand of the chronometer.

"Better." He could imagine her smile. "But still not good enough. I have another name, you know."

"You have?" Personally, Adam couldn't have cared less, but his training prevented him from telling her so. Obey, agree, don't argue and suffer in silence. That was the only way to live with a woman. And be polite. Always be polite.

"Don't you want to know what it is?"

"Of course," he lied. "What is it?"

"Can't you guess?" She was being arch. Adam, watching the clock, resigned himself to the fact that she, like all women, was going to have the last word. "General Welkin seemed most impressed. It's Evelyn." She giggled. "Don't you get it? Adam and . . ." The static from her rockets drowned out the rest.

Adam snatched his hand from the firing button just in time. He was trembling and his forehead was damp with sweat. Ahead of him the woman's rocket exhaust dwindled as it carried her towards Venus. He stared at the little point of brightness for a long time, then at the scarred Earth rolling below.

It couldn't be simple coincidence, not with names like that it couldn't. Fate? Providence? The mysticism of General Welkin or the incomprehensible workings of a strange destiny? Adam didn't know, and he didn't care. The only thing he was sure of was that it wasn't going to happen all over again.

He grinned as the thrust of his rockets carried him towards Mars.

Don't keep it a secret

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THE EVOLUTION OF MAN

by Kenneth Johns

Part Eight: Conclusion—MAN ALONE

THE FINAL DRAMA of the emergence of *Homo sapiens* from the mists of obscurity which cloak his early and middle development on his planet, is played out on stages situated on the basis of fossil evidence in our possession, in Africa, Europe and England.

Much of Man's actions on those stages is baffling; but we know far more about later Man than we do of Early Man, because those actions helped preserve specimens for us to study today. Early Man has usually just left isolated clues and intriguing mysteries.

Among the finds unearthed by Broom during his South African Ape-man discoveries was a disfigured jawbone with worn teeth. After careful measurement, Broom and his assistant, John T. Robinson, felt that it was sufficiently different from the associated remains for them to assume that here was an example of an improved form of sub-man, living at the same time as *Austra-*

lopithecus, South African Ape-man. They christened the new man *Telanthropus*.

Some authorities differ, however, and feel that the few fragments so far found belonged to a diminutive female of the better-known Ape-man. Again, we must wait for further evidence.

In 1921, when there were not so many fossil men known as there are today, opencast mining of lead and zinc ores at Broken Hill, Northern Rhodesia, brought to light the first-known skull of Rhodesian Man. Subsequently, the upper portion of a second skull was found, naturally exposed by erosion, near Saldanha, Hopefield, eighty miles north of Cape Town. These two finds of the same stock indicate that Rhodesian Man wandered over the continent. With his remains, which were not buried by his companions, are found mysterious round balls of stone. The well-known bolas of the South American pampas immediately sprang

to mind, and theories circulated that these early sub-men of the African veldt likewise hurled their three-thonged stones to bring down game. We cannot be sure that this is so, and the stones are not, as erroneously reported, invariably found in threes.

From bones of the hip and leg discovered in the lead and zinc levels of the Broken Hill cave it is clear that Rhodesian Man had a body similar to modern man's, although there is a huge bar of bone over the almost square eye sockets—the largest brow ridge known in man—and the face is generally thrust forward. No jaw is known. The brain case is low; the forehead, although existing, negligible, and structural evidence shows that the head was carried uprightly on the spine.

All the foregoing conditions are much the same as those found in Solo Man from Java—especially the “bolas balls”—which was the clincher to a theory, not generally accepted, that Rhodesian Man made his way across the world, arriving in Java via the land bridge which, in Upper Pleistocene times, connected the island with the African mainland. The trouble with this theory is that Rhodesian Man had a brain capacity of 1,300 ccs, whilst his skull is less heavy and larger than Solo Man's. One explanation of this paradox may be found in recent facts which tend to show

that races of almost-men can in fact degenerate, reverting through generations to primitiveness. Until we have a 100% reliable time-clock for dating the remains of these proto-men found in the earth from periods over 40,000 years ago, all dates must be a matter of speculation and conjecture from allied artifacts, animal fossils and geological strata.

It cannot be too strongly emphasised that anthropologists are attempting to reconstruct the life and habits and the form of a large number of individuals from, very often, a mere fragment of bone. A single glance around any gathering of today will show that modern man has, within limits, a skull form widely varying from individual to individual. In any society there are specimens verging on the future of the race together with specimens who have retained anachronistic features from the past. What is true of modern man may be considered to be true of ancient man and of sub-man, with the addition that early man probably differed more widely in his own group. One instance of this is the marked difference between fossil male and female skulls, far more pronounced than that between the sexes of today.

Another factor to be taken into account is the sometimes unpredictable action of the pituitary,

the gland at the base of the brain which controls human growth. If this becomes disordered the result is often seen in a distortion and thickening of the bones, a condition called acromegaly. In the skull it can lead to a thickening and pronounced jutting forward of the torus, the supra-orbital ridge of bone above the eyes. An unwary person discovering a skull with such a heavy brow ridge might well imagine that an ancient skull had been found; this facile answer was, in fact, the reaction of some sections of recognised science when the first fossil men were unearthed during the last century. Long treatises were written which completely proved that early fossil finds—now known to be genuine—were primitive reversals of current humanity, diseased persons—anything but acknowledge the fact that Man had evolved.

So it is that the anthropologist and palæontologist must ever be on watch to be certain that their finds are genuine—and why any amateur blessed enough to discover early remains should leave them intact and run—not walk—to the nearest anthropological professional for photographs and measuring sticks and careful, delicate and knowledgeable excavation.

With this uncertainty as to the time in the history of the Earth when these extinct races of sub-

men lived, we are faced with the fact that we cannot trace a neat line of evolution from a higher Primate tarsier form, through ape-like forms, leaving the trees and becoming ground-apes, and then developing through the fossils we have in an ascending order. Especially when we now have to turn back the pages of the past, leaving Rhodesian Man at the Upper Pleistocene, and return to the Lower Pleistocene, to the time of the first interglacial, beginning 560,000 years ago, and to a place that later was to become known as Mauer, near Heidelberg, Germany.

Here, in 1907, Dr. Otto Schoetensack found a massive jaw with teeth, which is known as Heidelberg Man. Its age is dated from the gravel pit in which it was found, and so places it as being one of the oldest sub-men fossils known, being surpassed only by the South African Ape-man and possibly by early Java Man. It is not quite so massive as Java Man's jaw, being shorter and the teeth are rather small for the jaw. It is the first inkling we have of an allied race of men growing up alongside the still unknown ancestors of *Homo sapiens*. There is some resemblance to the mauled *Telanthropus* jaw. Heidelberg man was a chinless, shambling creature with a small brain competing with the sabre-tooth, and yet intelligent

enough to make stone tools. The jaw structure is such that he could never have spoken clearly. He wandered across Europe at the beginning of the Pleistocene, almost a million years ago.

Leading up along this line of evolution we come to the skull of a young woman found in a cave at Steinheim in 1933. This dates from the warm phase of the third glacial, which began 220,000 years ago. This young lady's skull has prominent brow ridges, a rounded shape and a quite small brain, and we assume that she was the link between Heidelberg Man and her more famous descendants, maturing alongside *Homo sapiens*.

All evolution is a struggle, wherein the fittest survive; and today, *Homo sapiens*, by being the only known species of man on this planet, can be fairly said to have won the battle. But this struggle for a planet, this race for life, was not just a single entry—there were the also-rans, some of whom have been traced through this history.

Perhaps the most famous and well known of all fossil men, the one race which has left an indelible mark on our own culture so that today stories are written with him as the central character, is that pathetic, shambling, bow-legged figure, hovering on the dawn of civilisation with all his mystery and

pathos, the figure we may regard with a deep-rooted guilt complex—the tragic and tortured figure of Neanderthal Man.

Piltdown Man and Neanderthal Man together seem to epitomise the attitude of many to the story of our ancestors. One a hoax. The other the subject of an avalanche of ill-informed, credulous ridicule. Within the race of *Homo Neanderthalensis* were many sub-divisions; the two most striking being Early and Late, and their development was backward, not forward. Neanderthal Man—pronounced *Nay-and-ertahl* Man—lived and hunted all over Europe and Western Asia during the third interglacial and the first part of the Fourth Ice Age. However much of a failure as a man he may have been, he was in possession of much of this planet for 100,000 years; this we know. We cannot be sure that *Homo sapiens* has been in control for nearly as long, even though we believe that he was a contemporary of the earliest representatives of Neanderthal Man.

The early Neanderthals were not too dissimilar to modern man. Fossils have been found in many places, in Germany, Italy, Palestine and, in Yugoslavia, twenty in one cave. Other fossils have been found in Tangier, the Crimea, Libya, Iraq and Iran, and in Russian Turkestan. Taken as a group, they show clearly the

marked change that overtook the race from its hazy beginnings until its mysterious and sudden end.

Although the first-known Neanderthal skull was discovered near Gibraltar over a hundred years ago, the first to excite attention and to give its name to the fossil remains found thereafter was found in the valley of the Neander, near Dusseldorf, by workmen quarrying limestone in a cave. The fossils had been broken up and removed from their point of burial; but the many subsequent finds have rectified what would have been a tragic loss had this been the only discovery. Neanderthal Man came on the scene of modern anthropology exactly a hundred years ago; it is his Centenary.

Neanderthal Man is featured in lay literature as a beetle-browed, hairy, long-armed, shambling creature. This is only partly true. The bones of his fore-arms and lower legs were shorter in proportion than ours. He was, on the average, about five feet tall, and the women were shorter. We cannot guess what his hairy covering was; he may have had only the same amount of body-hair as ourselves. We do not know what colour his skin was.

But we do know that he had a larger brain than us.

And it is in the brain that the greatest differences are seen. Some fossils are known with skull

capacities of 1,625 ccs, more than the average European of today; but the shape of the skull shows that his brain had branched along a different, lonely path of evolution. Bearing some similarity to *Sinanthropus*' skull, the later Neanderthals of Europe have skulls that are exceptionally long and flat, and which puff out over the ears and neck. The forehead is not worth mentioning; and it is the forehead which covers the areas of the brain connected with abstract concepts and ideas. But, even though he had bent thigh-bones which caused him to shamble rather than walk, and his neck muscles were so thick that his head jutted forward so that he is one of the few men who did not walk upright, we cannot dismiss him as an ape-man. Neanderthal Man was a real man, if not a member of *Homo sapiens*.

His stone culture—the Mousterian—is far superior to anything preceding, and we conjecture that he fashioned wood. There is no evidence to suggest he had a bone culture. He buried his dead. There is evidence to suggest that he possessed a dim comprehension of an after life, and he decorated graves with goats' horns and left food and tools by the bodies. That Nature should have placed this dawning grasp of the higher things of life into a human form destined never to advance beyond the first stages of savagery

a thought-provoking stimulant—it serves further to emphasise the essential tragedy of the whole Neanderthal story.

Yet there is a school of thought which suggests that the fossils found on Mount Carmel in Palestine, which give the impression of being a cross between Neanderthal and *Homo sapiens*, were, in fact, the progenitors of modern men, and that the two strains diverged, one to oblivion, the other to inherit the Earth.

If this theory is accepted it does away with any further search for our ancestors before Neanderthal—because they *were* our ancestors, sharing the same line of development, until one group became isolated in Europe and regressed to the Neanderthal fossils we know. They are the black sheep of the family tree.

Other theories, however, decline to accept this, and insist that Neanderthal was a completely separate development. To strengthen this belief; one cave has been found where *Homo sapiens* remains were covered by a thin limestone crust, and Neanderthaloid remains were discovered above this crust, completely isolated from the previous human occupants of the cave. Human skulls have been found mingled with Neanderthal, suggesting that they may have belonged to prisoners or slaves. But—Neandertha-

loid bones have been found in human deposits, split lengthwise to extract the marrow.

What is known is that towards the peak of the Fourth Ice Age there was a warm spell. Raging like a forest fire from the East came new men, tall, good hunters, possessed of fine skills with stone, fleet-footed, painters, artists—the men for whom the history of the world had been written.

By the time the ice had regained its interrupted grip over the land, the Neanderthals were gone. Murdered? Starved? Filled with the deadly lassitude that grips a race when its day is done? Dead of broken hearts? No one knows. What is certain is that 50,000 years ago the stage is suddenly swept of all the almost-human people living precariously upon it, and at last Man, *Homo sapiens*—us—comes into his heritage.

And yet—the oldest known fossil of *Homo sapiens* is a fragment of jaw with several teeth found at Kanam by Dr. Leakey near the north-eastern corner of Victoria Nyanza in Kenya. *This jaw is older than Pithecanthropus*. And from England, from the Swanscombe gravels along the Thames, come three pieces of skull belonging to a young woman of definite sapiens configurations, dating from the second interglacial, 460,000 years ago.

The Earth spins round the sun

and life grows and struggles up blind alley after blind alley, and always manages to throw a cloak of mystery around its course. Today, *Homo sapiens* has the stage to himself. His antecedents are obscure; there is much blood on the rungs of the ladder he has climbed.

Who is to say that another will not come after him?

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LIFE SENTENCE

by PHILIP E. HIGH

***Dalcey was tough and hard and had
a foolproof plan to grab the world by
the tail. His plan worked—but he had
underestimated himself***

Illustrated by P. R. Green

THE CARD, which came by express shuttle, had nothing to distinguish it. It bore only a reference number, date for attendance and the words: *Your application has been considered and approved.*

Strictly speaking the card was private, but money was still a corrupting influence. For a considerable sum, a man at Express Delivery talked and the card, which inferred supreme life, became a death warrant. An underworld Czar nodded briefly. "All right, Mattrise, you know what to do."

Peters studied the card at breakfast, read it and re-read it. He held it carefully between his

fingers, feeling a curious sense of elation, then he put it carefully into his wallet. He thought he had a year to prepare, a year in which to settle his affairs, a year to become used to the idea.

He had eight hours.

He was walking quietly along East Twenty Eighth when a voice called: "Oh, Mr. Peters."

He turned. He did not recognise the thin-faced man in the ground car. "Yes?"

"I was asked to deliver this." The man held something in his hand.

Peters came closer. Too late, he recognised the flared muzzle of a gas gun. The paralysing spray hit him full in the face and he tottered, clawing at his throat.



F. K. GREEN

Two men caught him as he fell and bundled him into the car. Al Peters had looked at the street and sunlit sky for the last time.

"Alive?" Dalcey looked down at the still figure on the operating table.

"Got to be." Parker was pulling on a white surgical coat. "I can't do a clean copy if the guy is dead; muscles sag, all sorts of things." He put his head on one side, examining the unconscious man carefully, looked up and made a comparison with Dalcey. "Yes, a fairly good choice; about your height and build, same coloured hair. Yes, I can do a masterpiece here."

"Don't slip up," said Dalcey in a low unpleasant voice.

Parker smiled thinly. "I want to live a long time. Further, I need the money."

Parker had been a brilliant surgeon, still was, but certain practices—Orthodox medicine and public opinion had successfully disbarred him. Nevertheless, there was still work, highly-paid work, if you were not too choosy; Parker wasn't. He snapped his fingers at his two temporary assistants. "Right, strip him." He nodded to Dalcey. "There may be birth marks. I'll have to copy them." He took out a note-book and began to study it. "Finger-prints, retina pattern—I'll have to make a cast of the face and

head, too, difference in structure."

Dalcey plucked nervously at his lower lip. "How long will it take?"

"The surgical side? With modern healing techniques, about ten hours. After that, they won't know you from the original." He indicated the unconscious man.

Gossetti heaved his bulk from the adaptable chair, wheezing. "You sure you want to go through with this, boss?" His heavy, dark face was flushed and uneasy.

Dalcey's eyes narrowed. "You turning chicken? I take the risks, I put up the dough. What's eatin' ya?"

"It's the selection that worries me. Everything else seems clear, but how do they select?" Gossetti removed a cigar from his pocket, chewed it, spat the end accurately at the disposal chute. "I can't find out, boss. A guy makes an application but it doesn't seem to matter what the guy is. They reject a scientist, a senator, accept a farmer. How does that panel do its selecting? What principle does it work on? We don't know, no one knows." He scowled at the figure on the operating table. "He was accepted; why him? He's a field insurance man, working on a wage-plus-commission basis, strictly small-time. Again, why him? No brains, no ability, nothing. When we knock him off, no one will even miss him." Gossetti lit

the cigar with care, but he was still scowling. "Why don't they select big-time guys, scientists, national leaders and so on? What does the panel look for, and why?"

Dalcey snarled at him: "You're my lawyer, *you* worry about it, that's what I pay you for. As far as I'm concerned we've short-circuited that part. They selected Peters. When Parker is through, I'll be Peters and they'll never know the difference." Dalcey turned his back on him.

Gossetti glowered at the end of his cigar. "I hope it works. We can cover up your absence for, perhaps, three years, more than that——" He made a gesture with a fat red hand. "Curtains, finish, the syndicate will fall to pieces. Maitland will get wise, start encroaching, bring in the strong arms. We'll all be fried by gush guns."

Dalcey's face flushed. "Hell, we've been through this a hundred times. The treatment takes eighteen months, after which I go to a recuperative home. You can visit me there.

"Yeah, and then what?" Gossetti pointed the cigar angrily like a gun.

"Who cares? When I give you the tip, you bust me out. Parker gets to work; eight hours plasto-surgery and I'm Dalcey again. If they need the guy that got out, it's Peters. They can comb the

world for him." His lips twisted unpleasantly. "It will be one hell of a search, he'll have been dead two years. What will there be to connect him with me?"

Gossetti shrugged. "Okay, okay. I only hope there isn't a catch somewhere."

It was not difficult to live like Peters for the specified year. The insurance salesman had realised on his policies and thrown in his job the same day. All Dalcey had to do was to live quietly and cheaply in another district.

He felt some unease on the appointed day, particularly when he entered the dominating ivory tower of Eternemax Building. He shrugged. Hell, the switch was foolproof, what could they do?

A quiet man in a white coat showed him into a neat aseptic room. "Do sit down, Mr. Peters." He proffered a colourless liquid in a small glass. "Drink this, it will ease the anxiety strain."

Dalcey drank, made a grimace and grinned uncertainly. Darkness seemed to steal up on him from his stomach, a darkness on which he floated and was lost.

He awoke with a feeling of weariness and a sour metallic taste in his mouth. The sun shone brightly through an open window near his bed, and beyond he could see the glowing spires of the city.

An attendant came in, surgically masked, cold-eyed, indifferent.

"Before you ask, it is all over. We keep the brain in stasis by a drug technique. Some of the treatment is rather painful." He paused, stood looking down at the man in the bed. "The latter stages are less exacting, primarily genetic and glandular. Then, of course, there is a great deal of intensified conditioning."

"I've been unconscious for eighteen months?"

"Short of five days, yes." The attendant paused, the smooth forehead creasing. "Your recovery will be rapid; tomorrow you will feel normal and you will be well enough to receive a visitor. There is a man waiting to see you."

"A man? I thought I only received visitors in the recuperative centre."

"That is true. It would appear that this visitor is of some importance, has influence——"

Dalcey lay and sweated long after the attendant had gone. A man of importance, of influence. That spelt police or investigation, or both. But how? Why? What did they know? He felt suddenly calm. He'd taken the treatment; after the treatment the law couldn't touch him, not even for homicide, or several homicides. He could spit in the lug's face and get away with it. Not that it would be wise, but he could. He'd just lie low, let the guy talk, tell what he knew——

The visitor was tow-haired and lank. His eyes, above the nasal mask, were a lazy blue, almost gentle.

Dalcey didn't like eyes like that; you couldn't read anything in them, couldn't learn, and the man was obviously from Investigation.

"Hello, Dalcey." The visitor pulled a chair up to the bed.

Dalcey said nothing. The fact that the Investigator recognised him upset his plans a little, but plans had come apart before. If you were smart you played it close to your chest and got other plans. You made out in the end, often better.

The lazy eyes smiled down at the man in the bed. "Smart Alec, huh? Playing it dumb, not pretending you're Peters. What happened to Peters, by the way?"

Dalcey said: "I don't know what you're talking about."

"Sure, sure. I didn't think you would." The man took a badge out of his pocket. "I'm Winters, Investigation, homicide division. What happened to Peters?"

Dalcey yawned pointedly. Coppers didn't scare him; he'd played against them too long. In sixty years he'd have the lot crawling round his feet, begging permission to lick his shoes.

"You heard me. What happened to Peters?"

Dalcey yawned again. "You're

talking to him aren't you? Want to check finger prints?" He held out his hand.

Winters' mouth tightened, relaxed. "Dalcey, you're smart, too smart." He laughed softly. "You think you're holding a whip, you think you're going to tie the world up in a bit of string and dangle it from your finger tip. You by-passed the examining boards and got yourself longevity by a trick. You rubbed out some poor harmless guy to do it." He paused, and suddenly the smile beneath the mask was tigerish. "You're going to live five thousand years, Dalcey. Five thousand years, tantamount to immortality, but it isn't yours to play about with."

Dalcey said: "Ah, shaddup. If I was Dalcey, which I'm not, what could you do about it? Nothing; I've taken the treatment, get by that, copper."

Winters stood up. The smile beneath the mask was almost beatific. "I've got news for you, too, wise guy, you've out-smarted yourself. Did you know you had to apply in person first, then send in an application form? No, I can see you didn't. At the interview they give you all the dope, stress the implications, then you go home for a year and think about it. If, after that time, you still wish to apply, you do so on the conventional form."

Dalcey sighed. "Your voice

grates, copper; go peddle a beat some place, you worry me."

Winters laughed. "Got it all worked out, haven't you? Figure the boys are going to bust you out of the recuperative centre, huh? Are you going to be sorry. Dalcey, you'll never get away with it; we'll smell you a mile away." He bent forward and tapped the nasal mask with his finger. "You don't think I'm wearing this because I'm worried about your health, do you? If I thought my breath would poison you, I'd take this off and breathe down your neck until my heart burst. It would be worth it." He began to laugh again. "The treatment accelerates the disposal of waste deposits, cellular breakdown and so on. You sweat it out through the pores of the skin." He leaned forward and thrust his face close to Dalcey's. "I wear this mask because you stink, buster, stink to high heaven, and you can't stop it. The body disposes of waste matter as soon as it occurs. Dalcey, you're a rat, a sewer rat, and, by God, you smell like one." He moved towards the door. "Wonder how you'll feel, living five thousand years and remembering twenty or thirty murders? You'll remember the last one for sure, because you killed a guy to get where you are now, and you don't know half of what's coming. You think you're going to attend my funeral and, maybe, buy me a

wreath. You'll still be thirty-five and I'll die an old man. Believe me, Dalcey, I won't die of disease or old age. I'll die laughing my head off—about you." The door slid shut behind him.

The Curator drummed thin fingers on the desk. "We know who you are, Dalcey. Investigation warned us, and we checked. Plastic surgery can do a great deal, but not everything. There are such things as respiration patterns, cardiac checks and so on which cannot be duplicated. Unfortunately, treatment had then begun and it is impossible to reverse the process. I am afraid you are in for an unpleasant time, Mr. Dalcey. You see, we select our subjects on the basis of certain mental characteristics, elasticity of conception, adaptability and so on. Selectees must be dedicated men, prepared to sacrifice for altruistic reasons, certain pleasures which they accepted as normal to everyday life. They must be men of courage, endurance, and prepared to face great risks for the betterment of mankind. It is too late to brief you now on the difficulties you will have to face; only bitter experience will teach you your advantages and your, as yet, unrealised limitations. Further, you are an advanced paranoid and this will hinder your progress even more. However, to be frank, it is interesting to us, profession-

ally. You are the first mental cripple to receive longevity. The panel is of the opinion that time, and you have a great deal of that, may effect a cure. If so, you will become eligible for the many assignments open to the long-living and may do lasting and useful work for the benefit of mankind. Rest assured, Mr. Dalcey, we shall watch your progress with more than usual interest."

The Curator paused, studied a folder file in front of him. "You have passed through all treatment successfully; in two days you will be moved to the recuperative centre. There you will be helped to adapt to your new and greater life."

Dalcey said: "Sure," in a dry, contemptuous voice.

The Curator looked at him quickly and shook his head. "I regret I must be the first to disillusion you, Mr. Dalcey. Investigation warned us of your intentions, and of course, prepared for them, but their precautions were unnecessary. You will not escape from the recuperative centre because no one will come to help you." He reached into a drawer at his side, took out a newspaper and laid it on the desk so that the other could read it.

The headlines seemed to leap from the page and strike Dalcey in the face.

MOUTHPIECE AND TRIGGER MAN
RUBBED OUT IN GANG SLAYING.

He read on, almost in a frenzy.

The bodies of Gino Gossetti and Nolan Mattrise, were, today, removed from a burnt-out ground car in a South Side parking lot.

Preliminary investigations suggest that the starter mechanism had been triggered to a heat pellet.

The eruption of syndicate slayings is said to be due to the inexplicable disappearance of the under-world crime-master, Ace Dalcey—

The Curator rose quietly and left the room.

Dalcey, crouched over the paper, reading and re-reading, did not notice. His fingers slowly clawed, he tore the sheet in half, brushed it to the floor and crouched, trembling, in the chair. There was froth at the corners of his mouth and his forehead was beaded with sweat.

Hell, no one knew, no one. Who had tipped off Maitland? Someone must have squawked or Maitland would have kept in line. He would never have risked a slaying unless he was certain that he, Dalcey, was out of the way. Who had tipped him?

Dalcey went cold suddenly. The cops! The cops had found out, used a stool to drop word to Maitland.

Dalcey began to whimper, banged the desk with his fist. The coppers, the goddam, two-timing coppers, saving themselves trouble and expense. They'd saved themselves the trouble of bringing

indictments that wouldn't stick, witnesses who wouldn't talk, or were blind, or just wouldn't testify. The creeping, two-timing coppers, playing it smart.

He picked up the paper, tore it to tiny pieces, flung it about the room. He'd show them; they thought they'd beaten him, they thought they'd beaten him.

He felt a sudden rush of fear. Maitland would pick up some of the boys, strap them to a nerve-burn table, they'd talk, tell Maitland the whole set-up.

Dalcey put his head in his arms. His life wasn't worth two cents. Maitland would get him. Wherever he went after the break-out—and he'd have to stage that alone—Maitland would get him. People would talk about a man who smelt like a sewer whatever means he used to conceal his identity.

He sat upright suddenly. What was he worrying about? He had five thousand years, didn't he? He could afford to wait in the recuperative centre where he was safe, or any spot the panel chose to send him. What was ten, twenty, even thirty years to a guy who had five thousand to play around with?

He laughed thinly. The smart coppers, Droop-eye Maitland—suckers, garbage rakers. They thought they'd beaten him.

The recuperative centre stood in spacious grounds, well beyond

the city limits. It had wide lawns, tall trees, lecture halls, swimming pools, recreation rooms, a bar.

"The purpose of this centre," said the lecturer, "is not to remind you of the amenities you have left, but to teach you, by practical experience, the changes in your normal metabolism. There is a definite need for recreation rooms and means of exercise, as you will soon learn."

Dalcey listened with half an ear, his mind busy with plans. He felt more alert. When he came out he was going to make Maitland sorry he had ever been born. He'd fix that copper good, too.

"You are now free to leave this room and enter the centre proper. Everything is, of course, free; no charges are made either for food or liquor."

Suckers, thought Dalcey as he passed through the door; no one got any place giving things away for free.

In the bar he selected the most expensive cigar and ordered rye. The cigar made him cough, but the rye went down with the burning smoothness of good liquor. Almost he laughed aloud. The law couldn't touch him, Maitland couldn't touch him, and here he was living on the fat of the land for free.

He ordered another drink and smiled at his reflection in the mirror above the bar. Come to

think of it, Peters hadn't been a bad-looking guy. He could have made good on video or the three-dimensional studios if he'd had the drive. That was the trouble with small timers, no drive, no guts or urge to kick and punch their way through to the top.

He downed another drink, brushed unaccountable sweat from his face and ordered another. He was on the sixth when he found that his clothes were steaming and sodden. He pushed the glass away and looked wildly about him. The drinks were doped; there was some trick, he should have known. He wasn't even near-drunk, not happy even. Like all these places that gave things for free—there was a catch.

An attendant came quietly to his side. "I see you have learned your first lesson, Mr. Dalcey."

"Huh?" Dalcey gazed at him dazedly through the steam.

"Alcohol is a toxic, Mr. Dalcey. Your new metabolism rejects it immediately it reaches the stomach, forces it outwards through the pores of the skin."

Dalcey resisted a temptation to catch him by the throat. "You mean there's nothing in this liquor? No drug or nothing?"

"No, sir, why should there be?" He smiled. "In any case, your body is drug resistant."

Dalcey picked up the glass

and hurled it at the mirror. A catch, there had to be a catch.

The attendant took his arm. "I will show you to your room, sir. Fresh clothes are laid out ready."

The room was spacious and well furnished. There was an expensive video, a shower and a reader for a whole library of micro films. Warm summer air blew in at the open window.

"No proper air conditioning. I could get a germ." Dalcey was still shaking.

"It is not necessary, sir, your body is now germ and virus resistant." The attendant withdrew quietly.

Dalcey flopped into the nearest chair. There was a nervous tic at the corner of his right eye and his lower lip trembled. He beat his temples with his clenched fists. Everything was against him, everything, and that goddam copper was laughing his head off—

Slowly he regained control of himself and looked about him. There was a neatly-wrapped parcel on a small table by the window. He wandered over and looked at it. Who the hell would want to send him parcels? It had obviously come by normal post. Who the hell? Perhaps some of the boys were hiding out some place and had sent him a gun? No, it was too small. He bent down, picked up the parcel, weighed it in his hand and began to undo it.

Dalcey had often come very near to death. Holding his own against rival trigger men in his early days had bred in him almost an instinct for danger. He turned suddenly and hurled the parcel through the open window.

There was a sudden livid flash, the brief sharp slap of an explosion and something took him and hurled him across the room.

When men came tumbling in through the door, he was on his knees, blubbing, staring at the blackened, bloodied things which had been his hands.

Outside the window a charred stump, which had been a young tree, still trailed acrid smoke into the disordered room.

A surgeon arrived and made a brief examination. "A nasty mess, but nothing we can't put right. You'll be normal inside a week. the treatment increases the healing processes enormously."

Dalcey looked anxiously about the operating room as the surgeons inserted their hands into hygiene baths and prepared instruments. "Aren't you going to give me anything? No drugs or nothing?"

"I'm sorry." The voice was gentle. "Your body is drug resistant. We could pump it into you but your body would reject it almost immediately. It's one of the penalties you pay for longevity."

He was strapped to the table. Someone took one of his hands

and began snipping away the charred flesh.

He screamed, tried to struggle, blubbered. "Goddam you, Maitland, I'll get you for this, I'll get you——"

After ten minutes they stopped and someone slapped his face. "Stop screaming for God's sake."

"Calls himself a tough guy," said someone. "Like all these killers; yellow right through, scared of having their nails pared. Maitland will love hearing about this."

Dalcey shut his mouth tight and bore it, but he nearly went insane. Five hours of unrelieved agony while the surgeons cut, scraped, rebuilt and grafted.

Within a week his hands were almost normal, but his mind was crippled with hatred. He was going to get out and cut Maitland down to cinders, even if they shot him to pieces afterwards. He began a systematic search of the centre for what he needed.

He found what he wanted in the private room of one of the administrative staff; a squat black kick-gun with a full chamber.

The man at the gate stepped forward as Dalcey approached. "I'm sorry, sir, you are not permitted to leave."

"Get out of my way or you'll get hurt." Dalcey pointed the gun.

"I'm sorry, sir." The man came steadily towards him.

"Get back, you two-bit hero. Want your head blown off?"

The man came on, Dalcey raised the weapon and aimed. Great beads of sweat stood out on his face, his muscles shook with the effort. He held the gun in both hands, felt veins stand out on his temples, but couldn't pull the trigger.

The man took the gun gently from him. "You can't use it; it's part of the intensified conditioning. A longevity is forbidden to kill another human being."

Dalcey didn't speak. He turned wearily, bent like an old man. Everything was against him, everything. There were tears in his eyes. He plodded unseeingly back up the drive.

"Just a moment, sir." Someone was striding to overtake him. "Just a moment, sir." The footsteps stopped at his side. "Your gun, you forgot to take it." It was the gate keeper.

The ex gang leader stared dazedly at the useless weapon in his hands. He'd just tried to kill a man and they'd given him back the gun. He just couldn't figure things out any more.

Time passed, but for Dalcey it passed more and more slowly. He avoided the lectures, never entered the instructional halls and rebuffed overtures of friendliness from other inmates. He dined

infrequently, and found that the hours of sleep were limited to a bare six hours a week.

"The body rejects fatigue toxins," someone told him. "Needs less food, too."

He became tired of swimming and cheating himself at card games. One day he realised that this could go on for ever. Winters' words came back to him—"It could go on for five thousand years." Five thousand years—of this! He felt sick inside. This was the nearest thing to the penitentiary, and he'd tricked himself into it. Sentenced himself to a five-thousand-year term. He began to laugh insanely.

Six hours later he tottered, agued, to the medical section. "I'm sick, you gotta do something. I'm sick."

"Describe your symptoms." The aloof, ascetic face was without compassion.

Dalcey described them. "Cramps all over, like someone was tearing all my muscles apart and I can't stop shaking."

The other half averted his face as if he found Dalcey repulsive. "What did you do? Try and hang yourself?"

"Huh?"

"Mr. Dalcey, it was foreseen that near immortality might be too much for some minds to bear. It was, therefore, decided that steps must be taken to prevent

self destruction. In treatment the mind is conditioned and triggered to a pain centre. It is obvious from your symptoms that you attempted to kill yourself. If you persist they will become worse. What did you do, try and leap from a roof? Hang yourself?"

Dalcey took something from his pocket and laid it wearily on the doctor's desk. "I took this from some guy in the private block; you'd better give it back to him. I can't kill any more, not even myself." His lips twisted savagely. "Not that I don't want to. I'm not the type to reform."

"Dalcey." The doctor's voice was sharp. "You think you're tough, don't you? You think nothing and no one can break you, but there is one thing that can, and that is time. If you lounge around day after day, year after year, you'll rot. You won't remember who you are or why you came here. To live five thousand years, a man has to be alert, interested, looking forward. You're just taking it out on yourself. Imagine five thousand years in here. Outside, language and customs will be changing, there will be new inventions, social innovations, a million things. But you, you'll be a useless relic, rotting, out of touch. Nursing a grudge about people who have been dead and gone hundreds of years. People will come to look at you, the small-time gangster who out-

smarted himself and couldn't take it."

"What can I do?" Dalcey was sullen.

"If you're so tough, do what the others are doing. Some of those boys are going to the stars." The doctor stopped, smiled contemptuously. "Sorry, that would take guts, wouldn't it? You don't have that kind of courage. When things get tough you turn a gun on your head."

"To hell with you," said Dalcey. The door slammed shut behind him.

He went to the lectures and learned that men were reaching out into space. There was a stellar motor, but even with that, some journeys took thirty years. On the nearer planets, specially adapted men were subjecting themselves to conditions no normal man could endure. Long-lifers were going out into deep space and bringing back knowledge, new drugs, valuable minerals. They were creating an Empire for the future, preparing for the day when Earth could no longer support her teeming millions and survive. They were bringing rain to planets that were dustbowls, they were draining and cleansing worlds that were swamps and muck.

Only a few of each generation could be longevity subjects. When a man achieved a life span of five thousand years, he sacrificed

his ability to procreate his kind. If all were given longevity, man would perish from the galaxy.

Long-lifers had to have a certain type of mind. Dalcey had that type of mind, but had not yet discovered it.

Long-lifers had to be dedicated to the cause of humanity. It was years before Dalcey discovered what that meant.

The old man sat in the sun, dreaming. He liked the feel of the wind and the sound of the trees after all those years in the city.

Someone came in through the swing gate, stood awkwardly some distance away.

The old man took out his pipe, began to load it slowly. "You're a long-lifer, I can smell you. No offence, just one of those things." He lit the pipe and began to puff it slowly. "I can't see you from here, my eyes are not so good these days."

"You are Chief Winters, homicide division?"

"I was, eighteen years ago." The faded blue eyes squinted as the other came closer. "Now don't tell me, I've got a good memory for faces. You're Ace Dalcey."

"I was called that, once."

"Why did you come?"

The other looked uneasy. "I don't quite know, maybe to say sorry, maybe because I didn't want you to die laughing."

The old man chuckled. "You

were a rat, then, such a rat." He re-lit the pipe which had gone out. "Saw you on the video the other night. Only eight of you came back, they said."

"Eight out of ninety-four."

"Where are you going next?"

"Proxeta, I hear. We shall be gone twelve years."

"Guess I won't be around when you get back. Eighty-six is a good age." The old man eased himself in his chair. "I won't die laughing. I wouldn't laugh at a guy who had guts enough to make good and go to the stars." He paused. "Can I get you any-

thing? A drink, a meal, maybe. Only got to press this button here."

"No, no. I—I just came—guess I don't know why I came. Conscience, I guess."

Winters smiled, bringing a mass of wrinkles to his face. "You told me why you came, to make sure I wouldn't die laughing, remember? I'm glad to have seen you." He held out his hand.

"You want to shake hands with me? Dalcey?"

"I'm an old man, son, don't remember Dalcey very well. Good-bye, Mr. Peters. Good luck."

SCIENCE NEWS

COLD LIGHT?

THE FIRST commercial high brightness safety signals and markers to utilize the long-lived radioactive gas—Krypton⁸⁵—have just been announced by United States Radium Corporation, Morristown, New Jersey.

The signals and markers, designed especially for installations where power and maintenance are limited, employ treated phosphor crystals excited to luminescence by Kr⁸⁵. Units, available in a variety of shapes, sizes and brightnesses, are suited for use in mining, transportation, marine and heavy industrial fields, as well as for low-level civil defence marking or other applications where little power is available for illumination of signal lights.

The devices, readily visible at distances in excess of 500 yards, are adaptable to a wide range of signal, directional and marking systems. Colours available include blue, green, yellow, pale orange and orange-red.

Sources are enclosed in hermetically-sealed, transparent capsules which are weather and tamper-proof, requiring no maintenance from the first day of installation. Circuit installation costs are likewise eliminated, as are replacements of transformers, batteries or bulbs. Refueling and cleaning of oil lamps used as signals are no longer required.

BOOKS

by Alec F. Harby

THE TRUTH ABOUT SPIRITUAL HEALING by Harry Edwards. Spiritualist Press Ltd., 12s. 6d., 151 pages.

The big fault with this book is, I think, that it bears no relation to the title. If you want to know just what spiritual healing is, how it operates, the studied opinions of those who practice it and any other relevant information, then you will be disappointed. Instead, it contains a dogmatic argument against constituted authority in the shape of the British Medical Association.

Now constituted authority need not necessarily be correct, and this is painfully clear in the B.M.A., itself. Orthodox practice has changed radically during the past hundred years. Operative techniques and medical practices now held to be perfectly valid and orthodox would have been decried in the early days. Pasteur and Lister were not immediately hailed as the geniuses they were, and, in more recent times, manipulative surgery has had a hard reception. Now osteopathy and hypnotism have both been accepted as respectable, orthodox methods and aids to recognised medicine instead of the stock-in-trade of

quacks. But it is poor logic to cite the history of manipulative surgery in order to claim credence for something totally different.

That there have been startling and inexplicable cures—inexplicable in the orthodox sense—there can be no denying. The “miracle” cures of Lourdes, the “faith-healings,” the laying on of hands, all present a challenge to which, as yet, there is no answer. No generally acceptable answer, that is, at least not to the B.M.A. And that is the basis of this book.

The author has the answer. To him it is perfectly clear that spiritual healing is exactly what it says—the direct intervention of those who have passed into the afterworld, working through various “mediums.” Unfortunately, as is so often the case, his very sincerity tends to make him dogmatic, and he attempts to prove his case by utterly illogical lines of reason. This, while it does not automatically damn his contentions, does nothing to help them.

To illustrate the above: The claim is made that many people have sought the aid of spiritual healing and, because of that, it has become prominent. Because it is prominent it must be successful.

If the results had been failures then spiritual healing would have dwindled away.

Again: Medical science, in many cases, has proved unable to help or cure the condition. The condition was cured after appeal to spiritual healing. Therefore, spiritual healing and nothing else could have been responsible for the cure.

The author also tilts at the Church for its reticence to investigate, or accept, his claims; and in this he has a better case than when he attacks orthodox medicine. There seems to be no valid reason why those who are concerned with the spiritual side of life should not be willing to accept the challenge.

The book, in itself, is mostly taken up with the case histories of certain patients who, it is claimed, were cured by spiritual healing after being abandoned by medical science. These histories were glossed aside, explained away and otherwise ignored by the B.M.A. On the face of it, this seems hard to understand, especially as the author has stated his willingness to co-operate in any investigation.

It may not be possible for everyone to accept the theory that spiritual doctors are on call to aid certain individuals, but that some individuals have a remarkable power to heal is beyond argument. This book certainly reveals the reception given to one of them.

SPACE CAT VISITS VENUS by Ruthven Todd, illustrated by Paul Galdone. Chatto and Windus Ltd., 7s. 6d., 87 pages.

This is a delightful book for the young reader, and the profuse illustrations are really amusing. Fireball is the name of the space cat, and this volume continues his adventures after he reaches the Moon. Equipped with his own space suit, he accompanies his provider—what cat ever considers himself owned?—on the first flight to Venus.

On Venus, they find a strange world of mobile plants, among them a moss-like growth which, when carried, enables Flyball to be in telepathic communication with his companion. This was convenient for them both, as Fireball had the growing conviction that he simply had to chase the little blue mouse-like creatures he could see in such numbers. He does finally yield to temptation, has a grim battle with a savage plant and, inevitably, ends up as the hero of the story.

Eminently suitable for youngsters who can read simple words.

BLAST OFF AT WOOMERA by Hugh Walters. Faber & Faber, 12s. 6d., 202 pages.

Every age has its target for boyish ambition. In the old days it was probably to run away to sea; later it was to become an engine driver, then a racing driver, then a



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jet-pilot. Now, or in the immediate future, it will probably be every boy's ambition to pilot a spaceship. This is the story of Chris Godfrey, who did just that.

It was a combination of circumstances which did it, the accident of meeting Sir George Benson, his size or lack of it, and the fact that it had become imperative to fire a human being into space. But first had to come the training, the explanation, the filling in of detail so that not only Chris, but every boy who reads this book, will venture up and up and up until they thrust into space.

YOU AND PSYCHOSOMATICS

by J. A. Winter, M.D. Rider and Company, 12s. 6d., 172 pages.

First, for those readers with long memories, this book has nothing to do with Dianetics or Scientology, neither is ever mentioned. Instead, it is a mature and adult study of a field of medicine which is claiming greater attention now than ever before, and I think the author has done a good job in clarifying what shouldn't be, but has been made, an abstruse subject.

The first chapter deals simply and fully with what psychosomatics are. The concept that the mind and body are two different entities must be got rid of before you can meet the author half way. The mind and the body are one, and what affects one affects the other. From there it is logical to admit the possibility that certain illnesses

could be caused by mental stress.

Admit such a possibility and you have done all the author sets out to achieve.

The keynote of this book is restraint. The author is an intelligent man, a qualified physician, and at no time is he ever dogmatic. He offers evidence of what is and, at the same time, suggests that perhaps there is an alternative explanation to account for the evidence other than that usually given.

A cold, for example. He does not attempt to deny the fact that some colds are caused by virus disease. He suggests only that some people who have all the symptoms of a cold need not have an infection at all. They could display the symptoms because they want to have a cold. Because they feel that they should have a cold or because they expect to have one.

Displays of anger, depression, stomach upsets, clumsiness, headaches and a host of other ills can, the author suggests, be attributed to some cause operating from within. Such causes may have their roots far back in childhood and, while consciously forgotten, still be strong enough to literally dictate to the body. And to dictate in a literal way.

This, of course, is neither startling or altogether new. What is refreshing is the manner in which it is put, the clear, logical explanations and, more important, what we can do to make ourselves easier to live with.

You'll like it.